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SEPTEMBER 20/27, 2021

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LOOKS AHEAD
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THE TERROR
OF WAR
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20 Years of Bloodshed and Delusion

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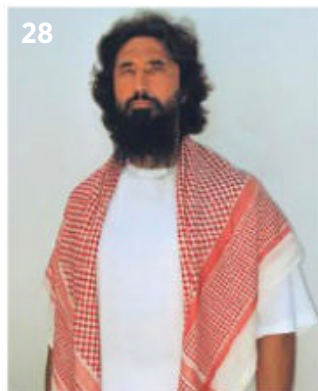
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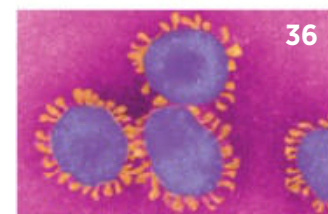
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EDITORIAL / DANNY SJURSEN AND LAWRENCE WILKERSON FOR THE NATION

Repeal the AUMF Now

THE UGLY SCENES OF THE TALIBAN TAKEOVER AND THE US RETREAT FROM KABUL underscored an uncomfortable truth about foreign military adventures: If you bet big, you can lose big—and it had better be worth it. The war in Afghanistan wasn't. Still, the barrage of indignation from establishment politicians and the mainstream media exposed their continued refusal to confront the real issue: that invasions and occupations invariably provoke resistance, rarely work, and are hardly ever worth the cost.

It remains an open question—though historically unlikely—whether Americans will learn from our Afghanistan debacle. The first test has already begun: Will Washington now dismantle the forever wars' twisted legal architecture and march its remaining boots off Iraqi and Syrian ground? In July, President Biden made the announcement that the United States will soon end its combat mission in Iraq—but not really. The catch is that most of the 2,500 American troops in that country are staying put, simply reclassified as advisers and trainers. More bureaucratic trickery, more linguistic gymnastics, more endless war—20 years into America's post-9/11 global crusade.

A month earlier, the House of Representatives voted to repeal the 2002 War Powers Resolution authorizing America's Iraq invasion. Though a symbolically crucial step, the bill remains held up in the Senate. Should it pass, it could finally bring closure to a speculation that Secretary of State Colin Powell made in November 2002 to one of the authors of this piece, when he walked into Colonel Wilkerson's office and said, "I wonder what will happen if we put half a million troops into Iraq and scour the country from one end to the other—and find nothing." As it turned out, US troops found no weapons of mass destruction, the supposed justification for an ongoing war that has killed thousands of American soldiers and exponentially more Iraqis.

While one of us watched the march to war from inside the George W. Bush administration, the other was a cadet at West Point. After graduation, almost all of Danny Sjursen's class were sent to Iraq. During the 2006-8 troop "surge," his platoon was often rocked by roadside bombs while responding to sectarian killings or suicide bombings. The sights, smells, and visceral terror of such scenes vividly demonstrated the madness of the hybrid communal bloodletting and insurgency sanctioned by that 2002 resolution.

Historically, such authorizations have proved open-ended and expansive. This is particularly true of the Iraq authorization, which was later twisted to justify the Syria intervention—and still later the assassination of a top Iranian general under dubious legal circumstances.

As tragic as the Iraq invasion turned out—no WMD, the Levant aflame, and Iran empowered—Congress still wouldn't cut its losses. Instead, it allowed four presidents to utilize an earlier and even more ambiguous post-9/11 authorization to wage a "global war on terror" with no limits in time and space. Incredibly, that authorization remains in force and was used to justify US support for the Saudi terror war on Yemen. Even so, Riyadh has essentially lost that now-stalemated conflict, while thousands of civilians in Yemen have died of cholera and starvation, the result of a cruel naval blockade choking off medicine and food.

In April 2019, Congress did vote to invoke the War Powers Act to halt US support for such horrors, but President Trump vetoed the legislation and a cowardly Congress failed to override him. In his first foreign policy address, President Biden admirably announced an end to American support for Saudi "offensive operations"

in Yemen, but the caveat—continued support of Saudi "territorial integrity"—raised serious questions about just how dramatic this dramatic policy shift really is.

Furthermore, Biden's unilateral—and congressionally unsanctioned—bombing of the allegedly Iranian-backed Iraqi militias inside Syria last February, and of Iraq and Syria in June, illustrate how alarmingly useful an AUMF is to satisfying the whims of presidents. (Although the United States launched missiles across international borders, White House press secretary John Kirby framed the strikes as "defensive" responses to rocket attacks on US bases.)

The 2,500 service members in Iraq serve as little more than trip wires for local militias posing no threat to US security.

Both post-9/11 war authorizations illustrate Chekhov's aphorism "One must never place a loaded rifle on the stage if it isn't going to go off." If presidents possess indefinite blank checks, they're almost certain to use them, and American men and women will inevitably start dying.

Chekhov's dictum also applies to the troops currently in Iraq and Syria. In a classic all-risk, no-reward scenario, the 2,500 service members in Iraq and 500 to 900 in Syria serve as little more than human trip wires or "rocket magnets" for local militias posing no threat to US security. When American casualties result, presidents feel pressure to retaliate and risk igniting a regional war.

It's long past time to cut our losses; we cannot lose if we do not play. Still, resistance to repealing the war authorizations remains strong. Just before Biden's June air strikes, Republican intransigents delayed a planned committee vote, demanding further consultation with diplomatic and national security "experts" before taking the 20-year-old authorization for the use of military force (AUMF) off the books. Predictably, these forever warriors trotted out their go-to threats—ISIS and Iranian bogeymen—that the original AUMF wasn't even designed to include.

After two decades of not just mission creep but mission manufacture in Iraq (and Syria), calling for more delays stretches the English language beyond recognition—consulting "further" might as well mean consulting forever. We hope Congress passes, and Biden signs, an AUMF repeal soon, and then brings all the troops home before yet another American dies. **N**

Maj. (ret.) Danny Sjursen is an Iraq and Afghanistan War veteran, author, and director of the Eisenhower Media Network, a group of independent military and national security experts.

Col. (ret.) Lawrence Wilkerson is a former US Army officer, Vietnam War veteran, former chief of staff to Colin Powell, and a senior fellow at the Eisenhower Media Network.

COMMENT / ALI M. LATIFI

Letter From Kabul

The final days of the US occupation of Afghanistan were a nightmarish embodiment of its many failures.



OVER THE PAST WEEK I'VE BEEN ASKED CONSTANTLY about the situation outside Kabul's Hamid Karzai International Airport. It's all any TV station, radio, or podcast wants to talk to me about. The grim images of devastation and desperation coming from there have managed finally to gain the attention of people in the West, who for years had ignored the two-decade-long occupation, which was presumably launched for their safety. Or for Afghan women. Or for democracy.

Or...something.

People are fixated on the horrific images. Young men desperately clinging to a US military plane as it takes off. Taliban- and CIA-backed

Afghan intelligence forces shooting round after round into the air to disburse hundreds of frantic men, women, and children. Thousands of families squatting in squalor in dirt fields outside the gates of the airport for days at a time.

What they fail to see is that all these images are literal, physical embodiments of the failures of the past 20 years of foreign intervention in Afghanistan.

While the newly rich and fleetingly famous fled to the countries they came from, the poor were abandoned.

It wasn't supposed to be this way. Not according to the politicians and generals who beat the drums of war. "As we strike military targets, we will also drop food, medicine and supplies to the starving and suffering men and women and

children of Afghanistan," George W. Bush said when he announced the launch of what the United States dared to call "Operation Enduring Freedom."

But freedom did not endure in Afghanistan. At least not the way it was supposed to.

The past 20 years have been rife with allegations of electoral fraud, corruption, nepotism, human rights abuses, and targeted killings. The food, medicine, and supplies largely bypassed the most vulnerable members of Afghan society while kleptocrats and warlords filled their pockets and expanded their real estate portfolios.

The progress that we did make has quickly dissipated since the government managed to lose more than two dozen provinces in the span of 11 days and former President Ashraf Ghani and his cronies, mostly unqualified dual-passport holders, fled the country, allowing the Taliban to walk into Kabul. Veteran Afghan journalists, artists, and entrepreneurs are now in France, the United Kingdom, the United States, and Canada. Shops and restaurants created by enterprising young Afghans have either been shuttered or are virtually empty.

In an odd turn, the Westerners and the elites, who spent almost their entire existence in very specific bubbles of Kabul, are now screaming online, "Won't somebody please think of the provinces?" People who for years excused or ignored the night raids, air strikes, drone attacks, and unlawful detentions carried out by foreign and Afghan forces are suddenly incensed that no one is covering potential abuses in rural areas.

When the Afghan Air Force hit a madrasa in Kunduz in 2018, killing dozens of

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YOUNGE —Hosted by **Jon Wiener**

children, they reasoned it away, saying, “‘Collateral damage’ happens” or “Those children would have grown up to be Talibs anyway.”

When the Médecins Sans Frontières hospital, also in Kunduz, was destroyed in 2015 by a US air strike, they said, “I heard Taliban were being treated in that hospital,” as if that were a justification for bombing a health facility.

When the Trump administration dropped the so-called Mother of All Bombs on a village in Nangarhar, no one protested or bothered to ask why the world’s largest non-nuclear weapon was being used in a remote corner of eastern Afghanistan.

But now the quality of life in Nangarhar and Kunduz matters to so many people on Twitter. Why? Because now those abuses are likely to be carried out by the Taliban, not by the people who were once signing the checks and divvying up the chairs in the Presidential Palace and various ministries. Not by the freedom-bringing forces of the US war machine.

But, as all of this was going on, millions of Afghans were watching—when they weren’t being blown up by IEDs and drones. They watched as people stuffed ballots and ran off to the countries they came from when they fell under suspicion of corruption or when the Taliban got too close to their armored cars and their houses hidden behind concrete blast walls. They watched as the Taliban staged a bloody, vicious offensive on the Afghan land under the guise of fighting an occupation. And, most recently, they watched as the Taliban traipsed into city after city—Herat and Kandahar, and then Mazar-i-Sharif and Jalalabad, and finally Kabul—and the people in power, who were supposed to defend and reassure them, kept quiet for 11 days. In all that time, none of Afghanistan’s “leaders” dared to utter the name of even one province that had fallen to the enemy the US had come to oust 20 years ago.

The people saw their country crumble as fat cats screaming “Country or coffin!” scrambled to get Covid-19 tests and book tickets to Istanbul, Dubai, and New Delhi. As their flights took off, the territories continued to fall, and now there is radio silence from those people, who had spent hours breathlessly espousing the greatness of their republic on social media.

That social media obsession had kept them from seeing the streets they whizzed passed in their armored cars on their way to their well-guarded homes or to the trashy parties with cheap alcohol, bad music, and shadily sourced drugs where they, the people running the country,

hobnobbed, preferring to speak English and German in an effort to hide their marginal Pashto and Dari.

They danced while villages burned.

They drank while drought forced thousands from their homes.

Then came the Taliban, with their guns in hand, and who was left? The Afghan people. The ones who saw little of the financial and political spoils of 20 years

of occupation. The ones whose roads are lined with Taliban-planted IEDs and whose skies are riddled with drones delivering death from above.

While the newly rich and fleetingly famous hightailed it out of Kabul, the poor were abandoned. Left to the Taliban. So they had little choice but to flock to the airport, clinging to any hope that they could make it out of the land where the elites and their American benefactors had managed to bring the Taliban back to the doorsteps of the people.

Two decades ago, George W. Bush set out to oust the Taliban, claiming to bring freedom and democracy in their overthrow. Now, almost exactly 20 years later, democracy has withered under the weight of fraud and corruption, and the US is packing up its bags as the Taliban set down theirs in the Presidential Palace. **N**

Ali M. Latifi is a freelance journalist based in Afghanistan.

**The grim
images of
devastation and
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the attention of
people in the
West.**

Morbid Symptoms

Jeet Heer



Cheerleaders of the Forever Wars

In reckoning with post-9/11 fantasies and lies, don't forget the press.

DONALD RUMSFELD STYLED HIMSELF AS THE LEADER of a revolution in military affairs that made the Pentagon ready for quick, punchy interventions. In reality, he was one of the masterminds behind the Global War on Terror—the longest conflict in American history, whose interminable missions are now derided as the forever wars. Although he lived to the ripe age of 88, Rumsfeld didn't outlast the wars he played so large a role in instigating. Two months before Rumsfeld's death, Joe Biden announced a drawdown in Afghanistan. But the forever wars aren't really ending. They're just being disguised as more politically palatable enterprises, with military contractors taking the role of troops and drone strikes continuing in frontiers like Somalia.

Rumsfeld's death provoked a scorching obituary from George Packer in *The Atlantic*. "Rumsfeld was the worst secretary of defense in American history," Packer argued. A fair enough verdict—but both the author and the venue deserve scrutiny. Packer and the current editor of *The Atlantic*, Jeffrey Goldberg, were among the leading liberal advocates of the Iraq War. Both Packer and Goldberg were staff writers for *The New Yorker*, where their advocacy for the war helped persuade centrists and liberals who might otherwise have been more skeptical of Rumsfeld and their ilk. They were in line with *New Yorker* editor David Remnick, who penned a notorious pro-war editorial. Goldberg wrote in his infamous 2002 article "The Great Terror" that Saddam Hussein had "possible" ties to Al Qaeda. This claim rested on a single named source, a smuggler named Muhammad Mansour Shahab. Other reporters who interviewed Shahab, notably Jason Burke of *The Guardian*, found him to be a fabulist who told demonstrable lies.

Explaining in *Slate* in 2008 how he got the Iraq War wrong, Goldberg claimed he "didn't realize how incompetent the Bush administration could be." The incompetence dodge is also the subtext of Packer's Rumsfeld obituary. Packer complains that Rumsfeld "believed in regime change but not in nation building, and he thought that a few tens of thousands of troops would be enough to win in Iraq." The implication is that an illegal, immoral war sold on lies could actually

have succeeded—if only it had been better planned.

In his new book *Reign of Terror* (reviewed on page 32), Spencer Ackerman casts Trumpism and authoritarian threats to American democracy as a case of the forever wars coming home. Ackerman notes that Donald Trump "recognized that the 9/11 era's grotesque subtext—the perception of nonwhites as marauders, even as conquerors, from hostile foreign civilizations—was its engine." Trump's xenophobia and role-playing as a strongman who can save the nation from enemies at home and abroad is a byproduct of bipartisan support for murky, unending conflicts.

This destabilizing extremist logic was baked into the forever wars from the very beginning through the framing used by both liberal and conservative journalists. The trauma of 9/11 provoked reflections on national responsibility from only a few far-sighted observers like Susan Sontag. For most of the media, nationalist melodrama was the dominant genre, with the United States cast as the innocent victim of an attack motivated by pure malice. "They hate our freedoms," George W. Bush assured a joint session of Congress in September 2001.

In 2001, UPI's national political analyst, Peter Roff, approvingly compared Bush's rhetoric about "evildoers" to the pulp bluster of fictional champions like Batman and the Shadow. "This is just the kind of hero America needs right now," Roff enthused. "In times of great national stress like the Depression, World War II and now, empowering foes with great strengths rallies the nation to even greater accomplishments and sacrifice, bringing forth great leaders to rescue the country."

Nor was Roff alone. *Time* said Bush was America's "Lone Ranger," while *Newsweek* said the president was a "dragon slayer" and "a boyish knight in a helmet of graying hair." As Susan Faludi noted in her 2007 book *The Terror Dream*, "The media seemed eager to turn our designated guardians of national security into action toys and superheroes." Faludi clinched her case by describing a memorable feature from February 2002:

A *Vanity Fair* cover-story photo essay featured Bush as a flinty cowboy in chief, sporting a Texas-sized presidential belt buckle—and assigned all the president's men superhero monikers: Dick Cheney was "The Rock," John Ashcroft "The Heat" ("Tough times demand a tough man"), and Tom Ridge "The Protector" ("At six feet three,

While Judith Miller lost her job at the *Times*, her coauthor, Michael Gordon, kept his—and then went on to *The Wall Street Journal*.

with a prominent Buzz Lightyear jaw, he certainly has the right appearance for a director of homeland security"). Rumsfeld had "gone to the mat with al-Qaeda, displaying the same matter-of-fact, oddly reassuring ruthlessness."

This type of macho nonsense not only sold the Iraq War but also contributed to a renewed militarization of American culture, which has provided the popular ideological rationale for the forever wars. It's hardly an accident that the superhero genre came to dominate Hollywood in the era of the forever wars. Nor is it a coincidence that a demagogue could then rise to the presidency thanks to a public primed to fall in love with vigilante saviors. "I am Batman," Trump told a young boy at an Iowa campaign event in 2015. All too many voters agreed.

In his scathing obituary, Packer upbraids Rumsfeld for a lack of introspection: "He never expressed a quiver of regret." The same could be said of many media figures who built the ideological scaffolding for the forever wars—although not Packer himself, who did eventually express remorse. A few, like Judith Miller, suffered professional penalties. Miller lost her *New York Times* job over her now discredited reporting on Iraqi weapons of mass destruction. But it's notable that her coauthor, Michael R. Gordon, kept his job and went on to employment at *The Wall Street Journal*.

The same principle of elite immunity that protects the architects of the forever wars also shields the media cheerleaders. Absent any penalties, there is no reason for anyone to change. **N**

Back Talk Alexis Grenell



Patriarchy Hurts Men

Andrew Cuomo's tactics of gender-based dominance and subjugation were harmful—to everyone.



ONE OF THE MUCH-REPEATED DETAILS OF THE STATE attorney general's report on Andrew Cuomo's sexual harassment probe is a message sent by one of Cuomo's longtime apparatchiks, Josh Vlasto. Watching the coverage of his former boss unfold, he observed to an unidentified friend, "It's not even close to what it was really like to work there day to day."

The "abuse and mind games" were, in fact, "so much worse." It's the next line, however—missing from much of the coverage—that surfaces something uniquely revealing about the gendered abuse directed at men: "But for me, it never really bothered me. It was part of the deal."

One of the most damaging effects of Cuomo's 11 years as New York governor is the way he defined power. Abuse, in his construal of what effective governance truly entailed, was a necessary ingredient; it was part and parcel of competence itself. We know how this played out for women. Less discussed is the insidious way it applied to men. For them, it meant aping the man in charge and conforming to his specific performance of masculinity—which was inextricably linked to their own subjugation and willingness to prove themselves by dominating others.

Looking back on the sheer tonnage of news reporting starting from February 27, when former Cuomo aide Charlotte Bennett gave an exclusive interview to *The New York Times*, there are exactly two male ex-Cuomo employees who said on the record that they or others were abused: Joel Wertheimer and Peter Yacobellis. The rest are either spokesmen or former but loyal aides, supporting some version of the Cuomo company line: It's a tough place to work, high standards, demands much to deliver for New Yorkers, it's not for everyone, blah blah blah. Among former Cuomo staffers who spoke on the record, it was overwhelmingly women who corroborated the presence of abuse. The conversation in cases like this usually proceeds with questions like: Why don't men speak up when women are being harassed right in front of them? Why is it always on women in the most vulnerable position to take all the risk? Who are these Billy Bush-esque men who laugh along or look away? These are all valid questions. But Vlasto's feigned nonchalance offers some insight into Cuomo's specific form of predation on men, which required them to disavow their own victimhood and, more broadly, buy into the notion that men cannot be harmed.

The pervasiveness of that lie forms the basis of Ruth Bader Ginsburg's theory of gender equality: that in order to advance the rights of women, it's necessary to show how sexist laws hurt men too. One of her biggest



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successes on this front was the case of Stephen Wiesenfeld, a widower who wanted to stay home and care for his son but was denied Social Security benefits, which were reserved exclusively for women. Arguing that “just as the female insured individual’s status as a breadwinner is denigrated, so the parental status of her surviving spouse is discounted,” Ginsburg fought for the idea of men as valid caregivers while making the case for women in the workplace. She pointed out that Wiesenfeld’s son was also a victim of the law that “includes children with dead fathers, but excludes children with dead mothers.” The all-male Supreme Court found it harder to impose sexist restrictions on women when that meant penalizing a man. But the logic worked both ways, and once Ginsburg got her foot in the door for men, it flung open for women too.

Men’s liberation is good for them and necessary for women, who cannot and should not have to carry the entire burden of dismantling their own oppression. The trick is to get men

Women cannot and should not have to carry the entire burden of dismantling their own oppression.

to see themselves not as “allies” in some other group’s struggle but as direct stakeholders with something to gain. Part of the problem is that men are not supposed to complain about abuse, and when they do, there isn’t much of a language to explain it, so their pain becomes illegible.

“A man saying, ‘Well, he exerted a lot of control over my life,’ is probably hard for people to see as a thing that was harmful,” explained Wertheimer, who worked for Cuomo after serving in the Obama administration and first spoke to *New York* magazine about his experience in March. “How many of those men, though, were

missing part of their kids’ lives? But it was work, and men are expected to do that. A lot of men might not have conceived of the harms as harms, but I did.”

The earliest example of someone who refused to just take it “like a man” was of course the mayor of New York City, Bill de Blasio, the ex-governor’s favorite whipping boy, who loudly rejected the abuse and called it out for what it was. And for that, Cuomo mocked him endlessly, and the press mostly

reduced it to just a “petty feud.”

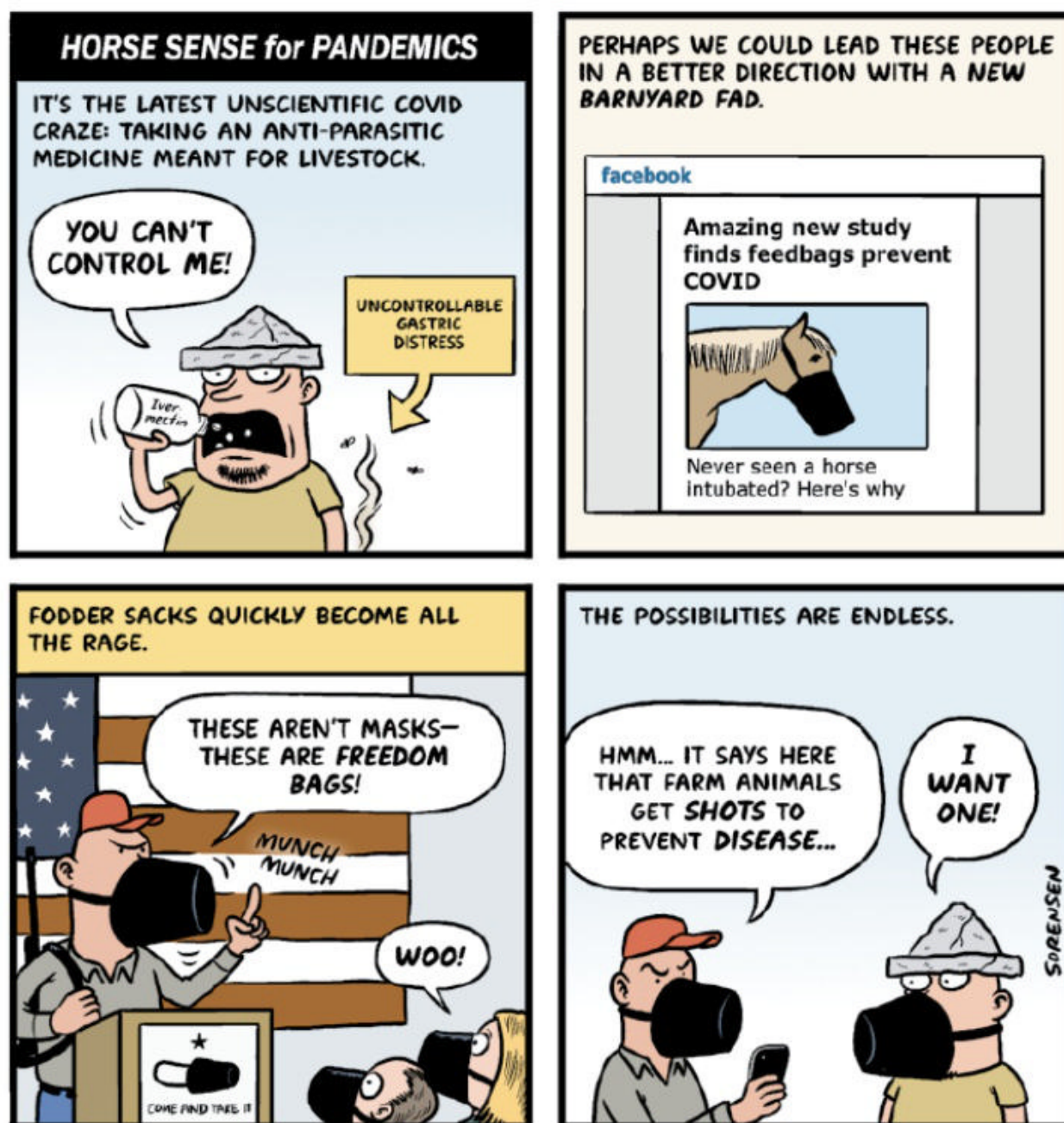
Something changed when Assemblyman Ron Kim spoke to the press. The governor’s screaming at a man while he was trying to bathe his children was newsworthy. Kim was invited on every major television show, including *The View*, where he connected his experience to the verbal harassment of his female colleagues by top Cuomo aide Rich Azzopardi, who’d previously referred to a trio of female lawmakers as “fucking idiots.” That show of solidarity is exactly what’s been missing from Cuomo’s male staffers. They have an opportunity now to own their experiences as part of a continuum of abuse, but it must also include acknowledging whatever role they may have played in Cuomo’s reign of terror. Men like SUNY chancellor Jim Malatras, who shot back at former Cuomo aide Lindsey Boylan in 2019 when she first tweeted about the governor’s less-than-friendly workplace for parents, posting pictures of himself with his child and smearing her as politically motivated. He can’t blast out statements now applauding the “bravery” of the women who came forward without also taking responsibility for bullying them into silence in exchange for power and professional advancement.

Own up or shut up.

N



OPART / JEN SORESENSEN



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COMMENT / AÍDA CHÁVEZ

Barbara Lee Has to Vote

Twenty years after her historic vote against invading Afghanistan, the congresswoman is still speaking up and taking action.

REPRESENTATIVE BARBARA LEE WAS IN A HURRY. The house was preparing to advance a multi-trillion-dollar budget blueprint and voting rights bill during a rare August session, ending a standoff with a gang of conservative Democrats threatening to derail President Joe Biden's domestic agenda. A frantic two-day session on Capitol Hill was coming to a close, and the California congresswoman had to go vote.

Since Biden's withdrawal from Afghanistan and the collapse of the US-backed government, Lee has had a lot on her mind. Just three days after 9/11, as the ruins smoldered and the country reeled in shock, Lee had cast the loneliest vote in her political career. She was the sole member of Congress—House and Senate—to vote against a resolution to give President George W. Bush sweeping authorization to use military force in Afghanistan.

I wanted to speak with Lee about her historic vote and the lessons to be learned from America's longest-running war. But she was behind schedule, juggling phone calls between votes and remarks. She tried to fit as much into my interview with her as she could, knowing she'd have to get back to the floor at any moment. I wasn't the only journalist trying to get her on the record—as the Biden administration wound down America's military adventure in Afghanistan, everyone wanted to hear from the one lawmaker who got it right.

"I urged caution because I knew even then that there was no military solution in Afghanistan," she said. As far as she was concerned, the 60-word resolution amounted to "a blank check for any president to use force anywhere in the world." Lee has reintroduced legislation to repeal the authorization every year since.

"I don't think the public wants to see their tax dollars going into nation-building," she said. "I think they do want to see their tax dollars going for diplomacy, development, humanitarian concerns, trade, aid, and really engaging in the world for global peace and security in a way that prevents the necessity to use force or prevents much of what causes terrorism. Because we know that the seeds of terrorism are sown, in many respects, in despair."

Lee's explanation for her vote that day in 2001 was sweeping, nearly free-associative, ranging from her college education to the circumstances of her birth. (Her mother was made to wait for hours in a segregated hospital before getting a C-section, a delay that nearly killed them both.) "It was based on my understanding of the Constitution, it was based on my faith, it was a moral decision because I knew that many were going to get killed," Lee said.

Studying psychology and specializing in psychiatric social work, Lee said, taught her that giving in to aggressive impulses on September

14 was not the wisest choice. "You don't make critical decisions when you're grieving, angry, anxious, and, in many ways, not certain what the appropriate response is."

There was also a sense of duty, that Congress shouldn't abdicate its responsibility to debate matters of war. Giving the president unilateral war powers, Lee said, "gave away my constituents' voice."

"So there are many things that came together and convinced me intellectually and emotionally that that was the right vote," Lee said. "And I still believe that was the right vote. Anyway, I have to go vote."

In late 2001, Lee received so many death threats that the Capitol Police forced her to get around-the-clock security protection. Thousands of letters and phone calls flooded her office. Those who stopped short of calling her a traitor swore that she would lose reelection. Her constituents, on the other hand, voted her back into office for 10 more terms.

Though recent events have, to many, vindicated her historical role, Lee doesn't dwell on the past. Today she's focused on achieving the evacuation of "all American citizens, Afghan allies, children, women, everyone who needs to get out of there due to the risk of being killed." The afternoon we spoke, the John Lewis

Voting Rights Act was going before the House.

"I do have to run," she said. "I'm voting for somebody else too, proxy. I'm sorry, Aída, but this is just one of those days." **N**

"I urged caution because I knew even then that there was no military solution in Afghanistan."



WHAT IS AVAXHOME?

AVAXHOME-

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brand new books, trending movies,
fresh magazines, hot games,
recent software, latest music releases.

Unlimited satisfaction one low price

Cheap constant access to piping hot media

Protect your downloadings from Big brother

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18 years of seamless operation and our users' satisfaction

All languages

Brand new content

One site



AVXLIVE ICU

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The SCORE

Settling for Less

BRYCE COVERT +
MIKE KONCZAL

It might feel as if workplace sexual predators are finally getting their due. After New York Attorney General Letitia James meticulously investigated sexual harassment claims against Governor Andrew Cuomo and released a scathing report containing evidence that he harassed 11 women, he resigned from office effective August 24.

Cuomo's resignation came shortly after celebrity chef Mario Batali and his former partner Joe Bastianich reached a \$600,000 settlement with James over allegations that they created a workplace rife with sexual harassment, much of it alleged to have been committed by Batali himself. James secured a similar settlement last year with Ken Friedman, the owner of the now-defunct Manhattan restaurant the Spotted Pig, for \$240,000 plus a share of his future profits. A month before the Batali story broke, Fox News agreed to pay the New York City Commission on Human Rights \$1 million as a result of the sexual harassment that female employees said they experienced at the hands of cofounder Roger Ailes and host Bill O'Reilly—the largest civil penalty the commission has ever imposed.

These actions, and their attached dollar figures, offer some semblance of justice for the victims, particularly in industries like restaurants, where sexual harassment has long run rampant. But diving into the details shows that they get nowhere close to making the victims whole.

The Batali settlement will be shared among at least 20 people, which means they'll get about \$30,000 each, some of which will go toward their legal fees. Similar math applies to the Friedman settlement: It will be shared among 11 former employees, netting them less than \$22,000 each (plus whatever the profit sharing might reap). If the attorney general's office finds other victims in either case, more people will divide the money.

But the cost of enduring sexual harassment in the workplace is much, much higher than these figures. Most victims face retaliation when they speak up, losing hours and pay, promotions and bonuses. They're frequently pushed out or fired, and even those who don't report harassment often find themselves quitting their jobs to escape an abuser. Their job loss doesn't result in just short-term income loss; they also usually lose their health insurance and other benefits like

retirement plans. A forced job or even career change typically means the victims have to start over at lower positions and pay. They may need to spend money getting credentials or training to enter a new field.

All those costs add up—and quickly. A new report by the Institute for Women's Policy Research and Time's Up—whose chairwoman just resigned after James's report exposed the work she'd done to counsel Cuomo during his sexual harassment scandal—interviewed 16 people who suffered sexual harassment at work and detailed the financial costs they faced. A woman working in a well-paid, male-dominated field like construction can suffer a lifetime cost of \$1.3 million. But even someone earning lower wages in fast food still loses over \$125,600. Some of the people interviewed remained unemployed for as long as five years after their sexual harassment.

This is some of what Batali's employees endured. James's investigation found that women were passed over for promotions and kept out of desirable roles.

Brianna Pintens, a former server at Del Posto, said in a statement when the settlement was announced, "I can say that my time working for [Batali and Bastianich] permanently tarnished my goals and passions for hospitality." Women at the Spotted Pig who reported sexual harassment were often fired or blackballed from the industry, James found. Natalie Saibel, one of the women sharing in the Friedman settlement, was fired for minor offenses after reporting his sexual aggression toward her.

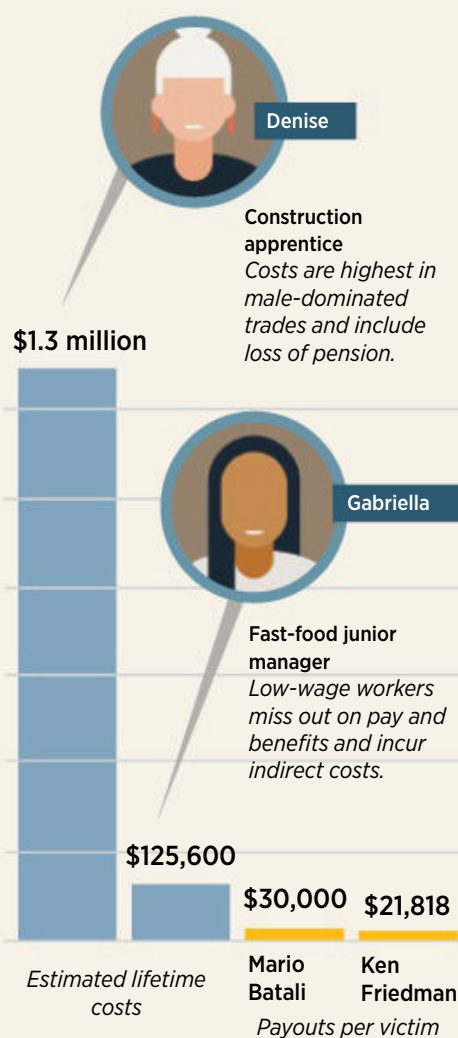
Trish Nelson, one of the Spotted Pig servers who was sexually harassed by Friedman, told *The New York Times*, "Even though \$20,000 over five years is laughable to most, it feels like \$20 million to women like us." It is indeed monumental to have abusers made to pay when so few victims feel emboldened to even report sexual harassment, let alone pursue claims, and rarely see any form of justice.

But we can't lose sight of the fact that, even with the progress we've made holding harassers to account, we still have so much farther to go before victims are no longer the ones shouldering the burden. Women who come forward are often accused of seeking fame and a payout. It's worth remembering that they are still the ones who end up losing the most.

Bryce Covert

Sexual Harassment Settlements Don't Add Up

Actual lifetime costs of workplace sexual harassment dwarf payouts that victims will receive from recent lawsuit settlements.



Sources: Institute for Women's Policy Research and the TIME'S UP Foundation



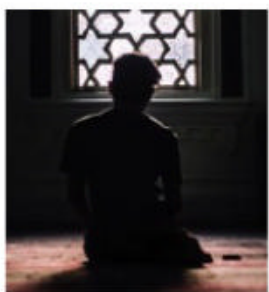
SNAPSHOT/David Bacon

No War in Our Name

In the dark days after the September 11 terror attacks, tens of thousands of people across the country organized and marched for peace. In this image, taken on April 20, 2002, the late Cobie “Kwasi” Harris, a political science professor at San Jose State University, raises his fist after addressing the crowd that had gathered in San Francisco’s UN Plaza to protest the invasion of Afghanistan and the harassment and detention of Muslims in this country.

—David Bacon

By the Numbers



194M

Average number of text messages the NSA collected per day in April 2011

0

Number of terrorist attacks the government could prove

were prevented by the NSA’s bulk collection of phone records, according to a recent court ruling

18k

Minimum number of Facebook users whose private data was given to law enforcement in the last half of 2012

100

Radius in miles from New York City within which every mosque experienced government surveillance after 9/11

\$100k

Amount government informants can earn per job, excluding “performance” bonuses

357%

Percentage by which terrorist attacks committed by Muslims receive more media coverage than attacks by non-Muslims

\$3.8B

Budget for the FBI’s counterterrorism and counterintelligence units
—Jarod Facundo



CALVIN TRILLIN
DeadlinePoet

Animal Dewormer as Covid Preventative

Joe Maga heard the anti-vaxxers say

Dewormer, not the vaccine, kills those germs.

Joe Maga died of Covid. Joe is gone.

His body, though, remains quite free of worms.

Six wars, millions
killed, trillions
wasted, and a
plague of suffering
inflicted on Muslims
around the world.

BY **TARIQ ALI**

The Foreign Master's Rage

Forever war: Afghan
security forces in
Kabul walk past
buildings attacked
by the Taliban a day
earlier in 2019.

THE TALIBAN OBSERVED THE 20TH ANNIVERSARY OF 9/11 IN STARTLING fashion. Within a week of the United States' announcement that it would withdraw its forces from Afghanistan on September 11, the Taliban had taken over large parts of the country, and on August 15, the capital city of Kabul fell. The speed was astonishing, the strategic acumen remarkable: a 20-year occupation rolled up in a week, as the puppet armies disintegrated. The puppet president hopped a helicopter to Uzbekistan, then a jet to the United Arab Emirates. It was a huge blow to the American empire and its underling states. No amount of spin can cover up this debacle.

A little more than a year before the 9/11 attacks, Chalmers Johnson, the West Coast historian and onetime supporter of the Korean and Vietnam wars, and a CIA consultant to boot, published a prescient book titled *Blowback: The Costs and Consequences of American Empire*. The book, which was virtually ignored when first published but later became a best seller, reads as both eerie prologue and searing epitaph for the past 20 years. "Blowback," as Johnson warned,

is shorthand for saying that a nation reaps what it sows, even if it does not fully know or understand what it has sown. Given its wealth and power, the United States will be a prime recipient in the foreseeable future of all the more expectable forms of blowback, particularly terrorist attacks against Americans in and out of the armed forces anywhere on earth, including within the United States.

Twenty-four hours after that blowback stunned the planet on 9/11, with sympathy messages pouring in from every capital—including Havana—the recently deceased war criminal Donald Rumsfeld declared at a meeting of the National Security Council that recalcitrant states, regardless of their involvement in 9/11, should pay the price. Accordingly, he suggested, "Why shouldn't we go against Iraq, not just Al Qaeda?" The next day, Paul Wolfowitz, the No. 2 at the Department of Defense, amplified this message by urging a "broad and sustained campaign" that would include "ending states who sponsor terrorism." Within a week, the Great Decider himself, George W. Bush, had

greenlighted an all-out war: "Let's hit them hard. We want to signal this is a change from the past. We want to cause other countries like Syria and Iran to change their view."

Then the usual minions stepped in. Interviewed by David Remnick for *The New Yorker*, Dennis Ross, the US director of the Israeli-Palestinian "peace process," was insistent: "We can't just do the usual thing—bomb a few targets, if it turns out to be Osama Bin Laden. If we respond the same old way,

nothing will change." Not to be outdone, the neocon Charles Krauthammer defended the invasion of Afghanistan two weeks later in his *Washington Post* column: "We are fighting because the bastards killed 5,000 [sic] of our people, and if we do not kill them, they are going to kill us again. This is a war of revenge and deterrence.... The liberationist talk must therefore be for foreign consumption."

Notably, these "bastards" and "enemies" did not include Saudi Arabia and Egypt, the two countries from which most of the 9/11 terrorists hailed. For years, wealthy Saudis had provided "fertile

fund-raising ground" for Al Qaeda, according to none other than *The 9/11 Commission Report*. They had, in some cases, grown up with bin Laden, whose father was a habitué of their palaces and had founded the construction firm that built some of them. During an early NSC discussion, an attack on Iraq was considered, but Bush, Rumsfeld, and Dick Cheney finally opted for a crude war of revenge against Afghanistan, where bin Laden and others in Al Qaeda's leadership were lodged courtesy of the Taliban government, which itself had been maneuvered into place by the Pakistani military with the approval of the United States in 1994, several years after the Soviet Union withdrew its troops.

The Taliban were quite prepared to hand over their guests to the United States, but they needed a fig leaf and asked politely for evidence, some proof of Al Qaeda's involvement. The White House was in no mood for legal niceties. A short delay was permitted to enable Pakistan to withdraw its military personnel from Afghanistan. Operation Enduring Freedom commenced in October 2001. The Taliban, on Pakistani military advice, mounted a paltry resistance. Their one-eyed leader, Mullah Omar, was last reported fleeing a central Afghan village on a motorbike, like Steve McQueen in *The Great Escape*. When US troops finally reached Al Qaeda's hideout in the caves of Tora Bora, the leadership had fled. Both Omar and bin Laden, plus their crews, found refuge in Pakistan, where the country's military leaders advised the Taliban to bide its time. The US and all its NATO allies, as well as Russia and China (good friends at the time), backed the war and the occupation of Afghanistan—the Russians, no doubt, with an element of schadenfreude.

Twenty years later, the grim, bloody balance sheet of not responding "the same old way" speaks for itself. Six wars, millions killed, trillions wasted, and a plague of suffering and trauma inflicted on the Muslim world, accelerating a tidal wave of refugees that has created panic in the European Union and resulted in a huge increase of votes for far-right parties—which in turn has pushed an already extreme political center further to the right. Islamophobia, promoted by politicians of every stripe in the West, is now embedded in Western culture.

The Great Decider himself, George W. Bush, greenlighted an all-out war: "Let's hit them hard. We want to signal a change from the past."

Tariq Ali's latest book, The Forty Year War in Afghanistan: A Chronicle Foretold, will be published by Verso in November.

The largest gathering for peace ever seen in global history was ignored by George W. Bush, Tony Blair, and their cronies.

“Precision” bombing: A man points to the remains of a pharmacy in Kandahar that was destroyed in a US air strike in October 2001.

and, no doubt, to discuss future trade and investment plans. Make no mistake, Beijing will replace Washington as the primary foreign influence in Afghanistan. Since China enjoys warm relations with Iran, we can hope that it will discourage rivalries between the minority Hazaras and the majority Pashtuns that might lead to bloodshed. Russia, for its part, will use its influence with other minorities to avoid the kind of civil war that broke out after the Soviet withdrawal. No outside power appears to want a repeat of that today. The US prefers to exercise direct control via drones and bombing raids, as it did a day after confirming the withdrawal from Afghanistan—to “buy time” for the Afghan government, we were informed—and as it did at least twice since the deadly ISIS-K airport attacks.

Given that the Taliban has taken up residence in the presidential palace in Kabul, what the US should do, together with its NATO allies, is grant refuge and citizenship to all Afghans who want to leave the country: a tiny reparation for an unnecessary war. Apart from that, the US should leave the country well alone. Real change can come only from within Afghanistan. It will take time, but it’s better than an invasion by a major power. It’s too early to say how this will all pan out; we’ll know better in six months.

ON FEBRUARY 15, 2003, KNOWING WHAT WAS NEXT AND HARBORING FEW illusions about their leaders, as many as 14 million people marched on all seven continents against the impending war in Iraq. Sanctions had already crippled the country, leading to the deaths of hundreds of thousands of children (as many as half a million, according to a 1995 *Lancet* analysis), a price that Madeleine Albright, Bill Clinton’s secretary of state, had said was “worth paying.” The largest demonstrations were in Rome (2.5 million), Madrid

“OH MAY NO MORE a foreign master’s rage / With wrongs yet legal, curse a future age!” wrote Alexander Pope at the dawn of the 18th century. Three hundred years later, the foreign master has withdrawn its forces, admitting defeat, with the full realization that the Taliban would soon be back in power. The war has been a huge political and military catastrophe for

the US and its NATO camp followers. “Freedom” did not endure. The Taliban, which controlled three-quarters of the country on the eve of the US invasion, now control all of it.

History is only modestly helpful for anticipating what happens next. After the Soviet withdrawal in 1989, a weak pro-Moscow regime managed to hold on to Kabul for some years before it was toppled, with US support, and replaced by warring factions of the mujahideen. In 1994, the US gave the go-ahead to a Pakistani-led Taliban intervention. Two years later, the Taliban took over Kabul.

The difference today is that there is no armed Cold War enemy as far as the US is concerned. The Taliban, once Washington’s friend, then an enemy, is now willing to be friends again. After all, the two have been talking for over a decade.

Meanwhile, in July, a senior Taliban delegation visited China to pledge that Afghan soil would never again be used as a base to attack China



(1.5 million), and London (1.5 million), while hundreds of thousands marched in New York and Los Angeles, along with huge assemblies in most state capitals.

The largest gathering for peace ever seen in global history was ignored by Bush, UK Prime Minister Tony Blair, and their cronies. Iraq was pulverized and its leader subjected to a judicial lynching. Torture by US soldiers (both men and women) was widespread, and triumphal rape pics were bandied about. For many, this was the face of Western civilization. At least half a million Iraqis died in the war. Baghdad’s museums were looted, and the social infrastructure of the country was devastated by bombing raids. These were war crimes, but they were “our” war crimes, and so they were ignored, disregarding the judgments at Nuremberg after the Second World War. In the War on Terror, it’s always open season: shoot to kill, no trials necessary, and indefinite imprisonment. Legal and moral values (“our way of life”) ceased to exist. Depleted uranium munitions were deployed in Iraq and, later, in Syria.

Even before the war, of course, the United States had played fast and loose with international legal norms. The sanctions on Iraq—which were imposed in 1990, just before Bush I’s Gulf War, and remained until Bush II’s invasion—constituted a war crime on their own. The target was the civilian population; the goal was to incite a spontaneous popular uprising. A senior British civil servant, Carne Ross, testified before a parliamentary select committee in 2007 and admitted:

The weight of evidence clearly indicates that sanctions caused massive human suffering among ordinary Iraqis, particularly children. We, the US and

UK governments, were the primary engineers and offenders of sanctions and were well aware of the evidence at the time but we largely ignored it and blamed it on the Saddam government....

Real history moves deep within the memory of a people but is always an obstacle to imperial fantasists. There is now near-universal agreement that the Western occupation of Iraq was an unmitigated disaster—first for the people of Iraq, second for the soldiers sent by scoundrel politicians to die in a foreign land. The grammar of deceit utilized by Bush, Blair, and sundry neocon/neolib apologists to justify the war has lost all credibility. Despite the embedded journalists and nonstop propaganda, the bloody images refuse to

go away; the immediate withdrawal of all foreign troops was the only meaningful solution. While the US has supposedly withdrawn, its planes are used occasionally to bomb the country. A ghoulis reminder that if the Iraqi government misbehaves, punishments will be forthcoming.

LIBYA, DESPITE ITS VAST OIL WEALTH, was another story, but with its own grisly ending. Unlike the leaders of the Iraqi and Syrian Baath parties, Moammar Gadhafi had balked at constructing a proper social infrastructure, which would have gone a long way toward dissolving tribal loyalties. He had given up on his nuclear program in return for Western recognition and was feted in Western capitals. His son secured his PhD at the London School of Economics—notwithstanding claims of plagiarism—after which a generous donation was promptly bestowed on the school. He also reportedly provided funds for Nicolas Sarkozy’s presidential campaign in France.

Gadhafi’s vices, eccentricities, and more serious failings were on display in February 2011, during an Arab Spring-linked uprising. He thought his new friends in the West would back him. The opposite was the case: They had decided to get rid of him, and the opportunity offered itself. But the story told by military humanitarians to justify US intervention—that Gadhafi was bent on massacring his people—was based in large part on an Al Jazeera report that the Libyan Air Force was strafing demonstrators. This turned out to be a fiction, according to congressional testimony by Defense Secretary Robert Gates and Adm. Michael Mullen. Nor were there indiscriminate, large-scale massacres in the cities of Misrata, Zawiya, and Ajdabiya when government forces retook them. Gadhafi’s warning on March 17 that his forces would show “no mercy” explicitly referred to the armed rebels in Benghazi, but he offered amnesty and an escape route to Egypt for those who laid down their weapons. Brutal though Gadhafi’s regime was, there is scant evidence that NATO’s bombardment prevented “genocide” or “another Rwanda” or, as President Obama put it, “a massacre that would have reverberated across the region and stained the conscience of the world.”

Unsurprisingly, there has never been a reliable accounting of civilians killed during the six-month bombing campaign. The more conservative estimates place the collective death toll—civilians, rebels, Gadhafi’s fighters—at around 8,000. But an academic from SOAS University of London, who had been advising the Foreign Office, placed the toll closer to 20,000 to 30,000 people. NATO’s planes did not protect civilians as they targeted Gadhafi’s forces. The dictator was captured, tortured, and mob-lynched. Ever sensitive, Hillary Clinton



remarked, “We came. We saw. He died.” Pity. In other circumstances, Gadhafi might well have funded the Clinton Foundation.

After the collapse of an absurdist pro-business neoliberal government—led initially by a Libyan exile in Alabama—post-Gadhafi Libya was taken over by a loose coalition of Islamist militias, including those linked to Al Qaeda. As in Iraq, the state had collapsed and a civil war commenced. Black Africans were expelled in large numbers and returned to their countries. Mali’s capital, Timbuktu, and much of the Sahel were taken over by “refugee militias.” The French sent in troops.

Meanwhile, there were more terrorist attacks: in London, in Paris, in Mumbai, in Islamabad. The War on Terror had failed on every level—at home as well as abroad. While the US military and its allies bombed and droned their way across foreign lands, their governments were busy waging war on civil liberties on domestic soil. From Guantánamo to the maximum-security Communication Management Units in US prisons, from secret surveillance programs to Donald Trump’s Muslim ban, the United States has tracked and targeted its Muslim residents. Across the ocean, Britain launched its own sprawling “anti-terror” regime, including a program of indefinite detention within its state security prison, Belmarsh, where at least one prisoner was driven mad and transferred to Broadmoor, a high-security psychiatric hospital.

Whistle-blowers who revealed the crimes in Iraq and elsewhere were severely punished. Chelsea Manning was pardoned, but Edward Snowden, who exposed the scale of the surveillance carried out by the National Security Agency, had to flee the country. And Julian Assange remains in Belmarsh prison, wondering whether the British judicial system will send him to be entombed in a US security prison on the basis of a dangerous, precedent-setting charge of violating the Espionage Act.

Three months after Baghdad fell in 2003, Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon gave a speech at the White House congratulating Bush on the “impressive victory” but urging him not to stop. Forward to Damascus and Tehran: “It must be made clear...that their evil deeds cannot continue.”

Those two capitals remain safe, but Syria is broken and Iran sanctioned. Where will freedom and democracy strike next? **N**

Masters of war: George W. Bush discusses PR strategy for the Iraq War with, from left, Donald Rumsfeld, Dick Cheney, Condoleezza Rice, and Colin Powell.

The war has been a huge political and military catastrophe for the US and its NATO camp followers. “Freedom” did not endure.

20
Years
of Bloodshed
and Delusion

The total cost of America's post-9/11 wars? More than \$8 trillion and nearly 1 million lives.

The Numbers

BY **NETA CRAWFORD**



The United States reacted to the 9/11 attacks with a military mobilization of unprecedented cost. Over the past 20 years, the US military has spent or requested about \$5.8 trillion in today's dollars. Add in future medical expenses and disability payments for veterans, which according to research by Harvard's Linda Bilmes will likely exceed \$2.2 trillion by 2050, and the total cost of two decades of war is more than \$8 trillion. Included in these numbers are the \$704 million in "death gratuities" that have been paid to the survivors of the 7,052 service members who were killed as well as payments to civilians who were injured and the families of civilians who were killed.

Every country goes to war believing that it can win and that

it will do everything it can to protect its own soldiers and the lives of noncombatants. But when things go awry, increments of force are often added—or surged—on the theory that a few more troops will make the difference. The war continues, and the costs in blood and treasure go up.

Wars take a toll on politics, too. Military operations may be shrouded in well-intentioned but unnecessary secrecy, and mistakes are hidden or downplayed. Voices of caution are often ignored, derided, or silenced as citizens, the media, and decision-makers rally around the flag and defer to generals. The Costs of War Project hopes that this accounting, and our other work, will promote transparency and facilitate informed conversations about current and future wars. **N**

Neta Crawford is a cofounder of the Costs of War Project and the chair of the political science department at Boston University.

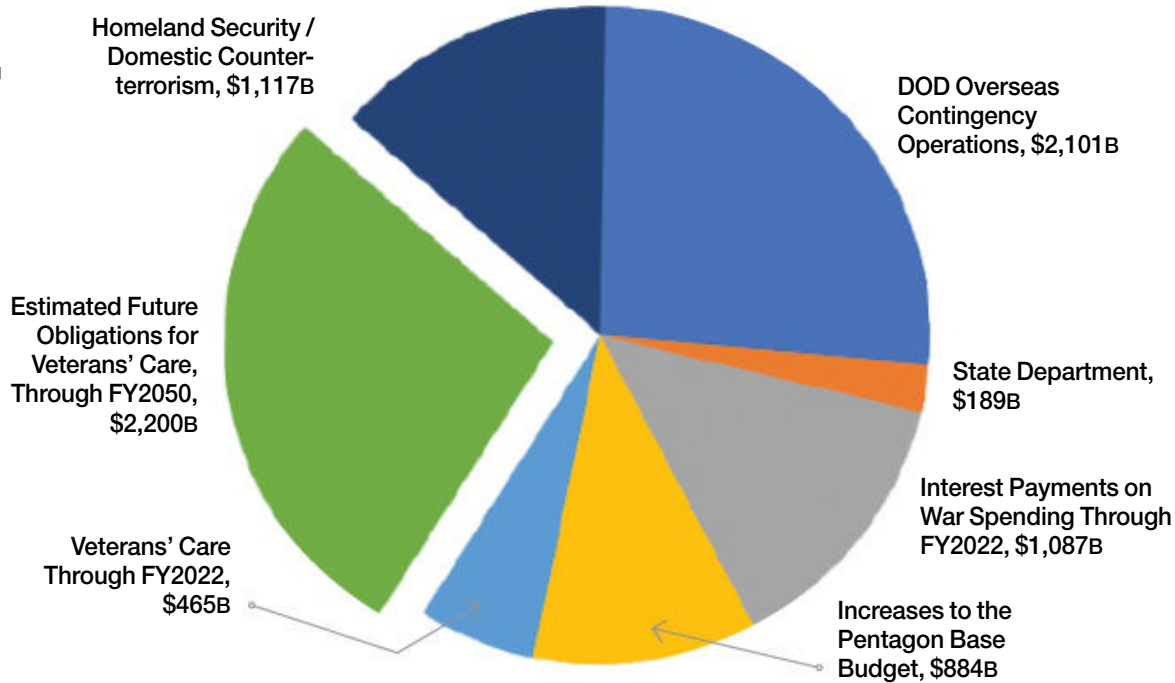
The Death Toll

Direct war deaths in major war zones.

	Afghanistan	Pakistan	Iraq	Syria/ISIS	Yemen	Other	Total
US Military	2,234	—	4,598	—	—	130	7,052
US DOD Civilian	6	—	15	—	—	—	21
US Contractors	3,917	90	3,650	19	2	511	8,169
National Military and Police	69,095	9,431	45,519–48,719	80,600	—	N/A	204,645–207,845
Other Allied Troops	1,144	—	323	13,407	—	—	14,874
Civilians	46,319	24,099	185,831–208,964	95,000	12,690	N/A	363,939–387,072
Opposition Fighters	52,893	32,838	34,806–39,881	77,000	99,321	N/A	296,858–301,933
Journalists / Media Workers	74	87	282	75	33	129	680
Humanitarian / NGO Workers	446	105	63	224	46	8	892
Total	176,206	66,650	275,087–306,495	266,325	112,092	778	897,150–928,558

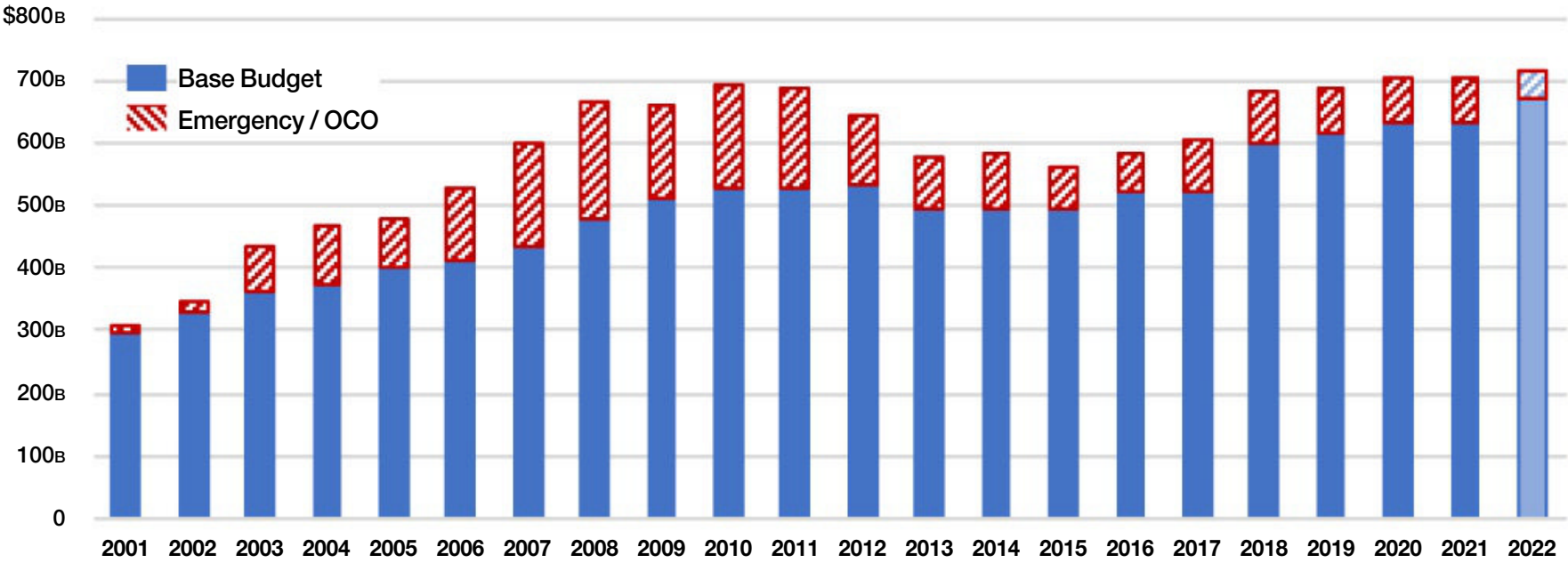
The Price of War

Post-9/11 war-related spending, 2001-2022, plus the projected cost of future veterans' care, in current dollars.



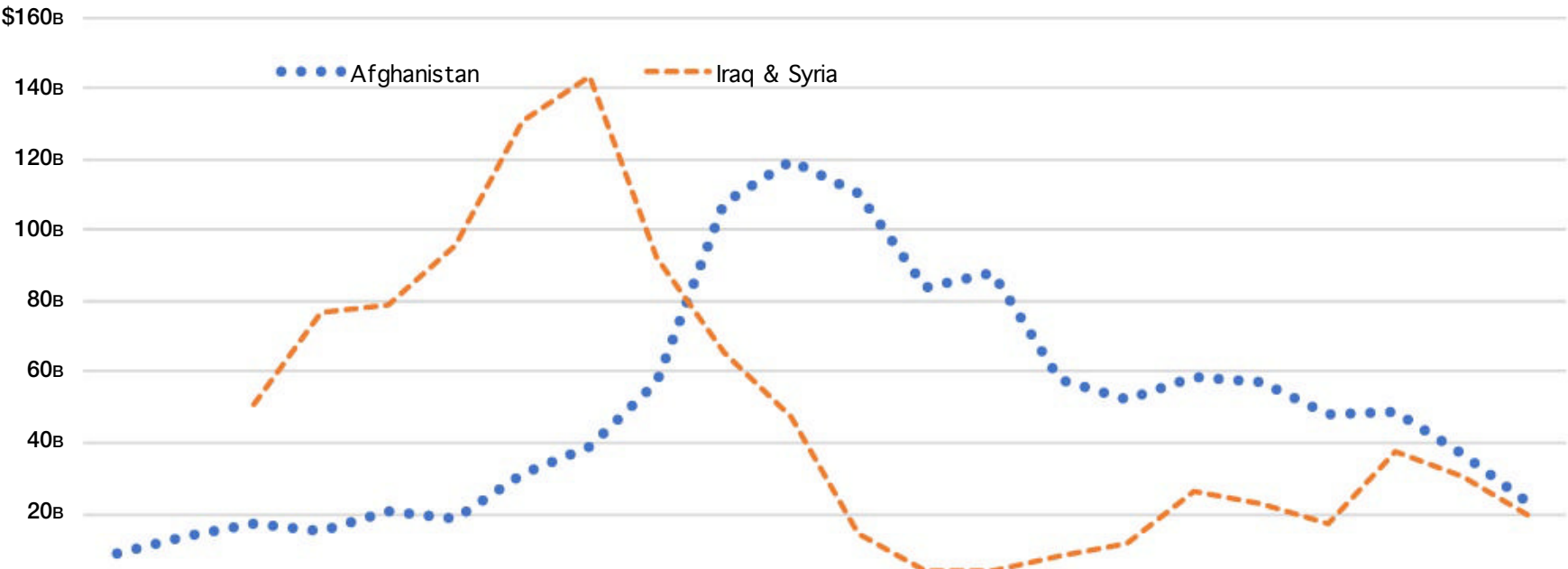
The War Chest

The base budget of the Department of Defense, plus the cost of Overseas Contingency Operations (OCO), or actions in war zones, in current dollars.



The Peaks of War Spending

DOD and State Department appropriations, 2001-2021, plus funds requested for 2022, by major war zone, in current dollars.



	2001	'02	'03	'04	'05	'06	'07	'08	'09	'10	'11	'12	'13	'14	'15	'16	'17	'18	'19	'20	'21	'22
Afghanistan	\$9B	14B	18B	15B	21B	19B	31B	39B	57B	107B	119B	110B	84B	88B	58B	52B	59B	58B	48B	49B	37B	23B
Iraq & Syria			51B	77B	79B	96B	130B	143B	92B	65B	47B	15B	4B	4B	8B	12B	26B	23B	17B	38B	30B	19B

The Making

After 9/11, Muslims in America stopped being a religious group and became a targeted, racialized minority.

BY MOUSTAFA BAYOUMI

20
Years
of Bloodshed
and Delusion

On September 12, 2001, the day after horrific terrorist attacks shook the country, *The New York Times* published an editorial titled “The National Defense.” In it, the paper focused on “the urgent work of determining how an open and democratic society can better defend itself” against terrorism. Sandwiched between several security-related policy suggestions, the *Times* sounded this note of caution: “President Bush and Congress must carefully balance the need for heightened security with the need to protect the constitutional rights of Americans. That includes Americans of Islamic descent, who could now easily become the target for another period of American xenophobia and ethnic discrimination.”

The warning was prescient, and we Muslims have indeed been living with dangerous xenophobia and discrimination these past 20 years. But, to be honest, the *Times* chose a weird way to describe us: “Americans of Islamic descent.” Nor was this odd phrasing unique to the paper. Near the beginning of the Patriot Act, the key piece of legislation passed in the wake of 9/11, is this sentence: “When American citizens commit acts of violence against those who are, or are perceived to be, of Arab or Muslim descent, they should be punished to the full extent of the law.”

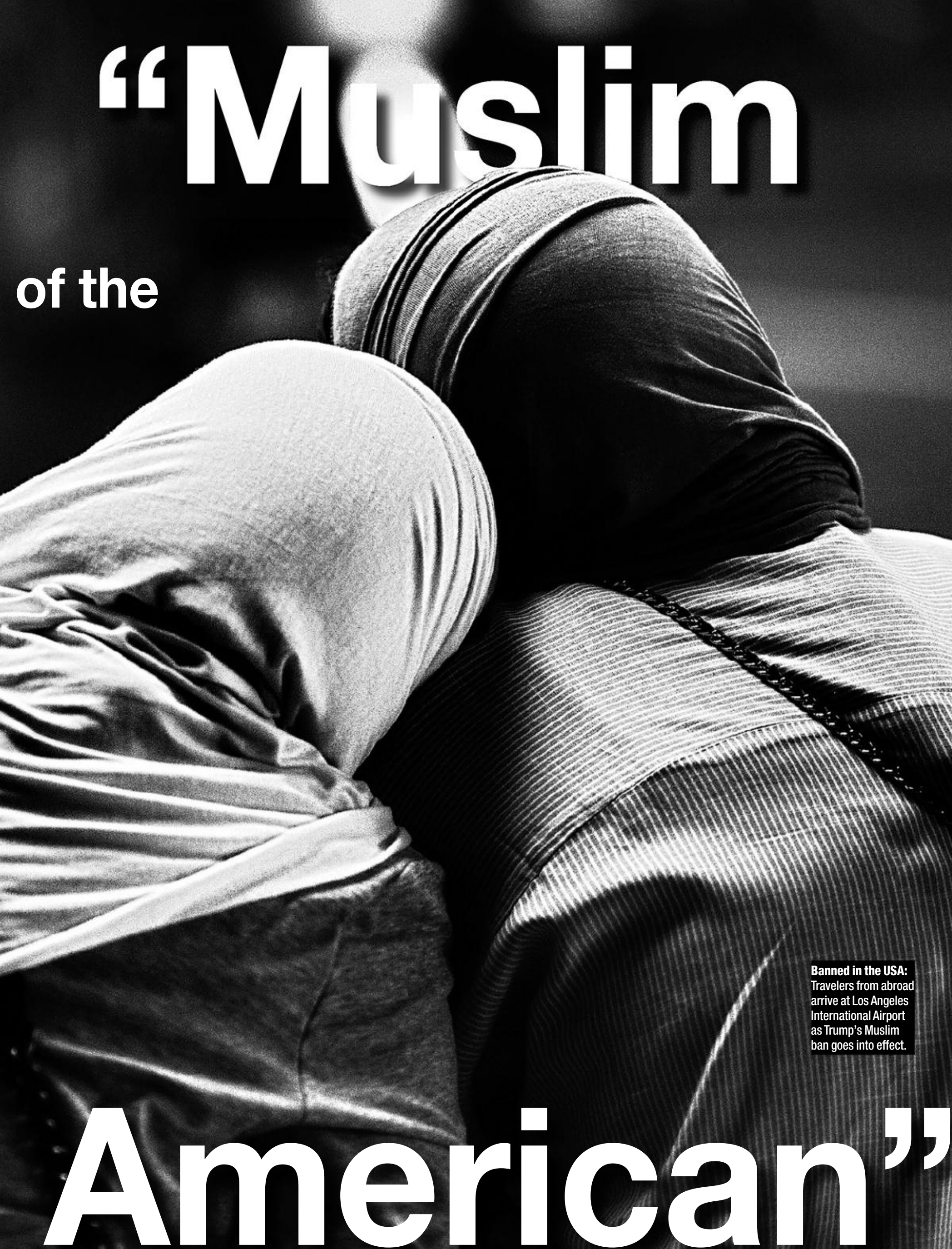
What should we make of this peculiar emphasis on “Muslim descent”? “Descent,” after all, refers to something that is inherited, but Islam is a universal religion. Its message is directed to everyone, and anyone can be or become Muslim. In fact, the latest data from the Pew Research Center indicates that about one in five Muslims in the United States is a convert to the faith. The idea of “Muslim descent” presumably wouldn’t apply to these new Muslims. Yet the phrase is clearly signifying something, so what exactly does it mean?

I would argue that it means race, that most American way of organizing the world, and Muslims have become the latest hue added to the 21st century’s color line. It doesn’t matter that Islam

is more properly considered a religion or that Muslims come in every shade and tone. Race thinking has never truly been about the fine points of scientific precision; it has always been about the brute facts of domination.

And domination has been what we’ve faced for 20 years now. Since 9/11, Muslims in the United States have been formed into what the political theorist Mahmood Mamdani, in another context, calls a “permanent minority.” Our differences from the majority have been used as techniques of rule, as ways of consolidating the majority’s opinion and power. Overnight, we “Muslim Americans” went from being just another of the United States’ multitudinous religious groups to occupying a new and highly targeted administrative category—one in which we are now collectively seen as a threat, regardless of our individual actions or beliefs, as if danger is a dominant gene passed down to us by our Muslim ancestors. We are a group to be spied on, infiltrated, managed, excluded, expelled, surveyed, studied, interrogated, and subjected not only to populist wrath but also, though less often, to popular sympathy. And all of this occurs simply because of our presumed Muslimness.

Moustafa Bayoumi, a professor at Brooklyn College, is the author of *How Does It Feel to Be a Problem? Being Young and Arab in America* (Penguin Press).



“Muslim

of the

American”

Banned in the USA:
Travelers from abroad
arrive at Los Angeles
International Airport
as Trump's Muslim
ban goes into effect.



In fact, Muslim Americans were not just racialized after 9/11; we were invented. The term barely existed in the popular imagination before 2001. A Nexis database search of “Muslim American” in news sources prior to September 10, 2001 (going back to a start date of January 1, 1986), reveals a scant 437 mentions. Since September 11, there have been more than 10,000, the upper limit of the database. Put another way, almost no one talked about Muslim Americans before 9/11. Then everyone did.

This is not to say that Muslims didn’t exist in the United States before that terrible day two decades ago. Muslims were in the Americas before Protestantism even emerged in Europe. First shipped from Africa as enslaved laborers, Muslims have a long and storied history in the United States, one that predates the founding of the republic. Historians have documented Muslims who fought in the Revolutionary War, the War of 1812, the Civil War, and every other major conflict fought by the United States. Muslims in America have fashioned the American landscape by engineering new modes of building skyscrapers. They have made Nobel Prize-winning discoveries in chemistry and have changed the soundscapes of American music forever. Some, like Muhammad Ali, are remembered among our most treasured athletes, and some, like Malcolm X, are revered (though once hated) for their fight for civil rights. They were all Muslims in America, but none was Muslim American. That came later, after September 11, 2001.

Devastating consequences: People rally in front of the Supreme Court as the justices hear arguments on Trump’s Muslim ban in 2018.

THE CREATION OF THE MUSLIM AMERICAN, AND THE category’s simultaneous placement on the color line, has had several consequences. For one thing, it has largely severed the history of Islam in America from its African roots, turning it, in American popular discourse, into the nearly exclusive domain of contemporary

brown-skinned immigrant populations. The Muslim American threat has fed the image that Muslims are forever outsiders to the country as well as a monolith of potential danger, ready to erupt at any time if the government does not act to protect the nation. By painting us with broad brushstrokes of generalized fear and suspicion, the racialization of Muslim Americans has by now produced its own political legacy, one that has structured the thinking of each post-9/11 president, from George W.

Bush to Barack Obama to Donald Trump.

In late 2002, the Bush administration rolled out the National Security Entry-Exit Registration System, which required all nonimmigrant males who were 16 years of age or older and from one of 24 Muslim-majority countries (or North Korea) to register with the government. (The program was directed at Muslim men and boys without a green card or citizenship, such as international students or visitors.) What appeared as a country-specific policy was really an administrative sleight of hand. As David Harris, a law professor and national expert on racial profiling, told a Senate hearing about NSEERS in 2012, “Muslims were targeted by using a convenient proxy characteristic: national origin.”

NSEERS led to an emptying of Muslims from America, as thousands of men and boys were placed in deportation proceedings and many more left of their own volition. Brooklyn’s Pakistani community was reported to have lost more than 20,000 people at the time. Under NSEERS, thousands of people were detained, often wrongfully, for possible visa violations, and the program broke apart families, causing untold trauma across the country. Not a single terrorism conviction ever resulted from the program.

And it was humiliating. Those registering with NSEERS, whether already in the country or just entering it, were treated like criminals: fingerprinted, photographed, and aggressively interrogated. At the time, secularly minded Muslim friends told me they had never felt more singled out for being Muslim, a new experience for them. Unsurprisingly, they also deeply resented having to prove that they were not terrorists during their interviews. My Egyptian-born father, a Canadian citizen nearing 70 at the time, told me in no uncertain terms that he would not suffer the indignity: If I wanted to see him, I would have to go to Canada. Even though the program was suspended in late 2003 (and eventu-

In fact, Muslim Americans were not just racialized after 9/11; we were invented. The term barely existed before September 2001.

ally, if belatedly, rescinded in 2016), he has never been back to the United States.

NSEERS was not the only program that cast a broad net over Muslim Americans, as if we were not people with rights but fish to be trawled. For years, the New York Police Department, in East German Stasi-like fashion, kept secret files on Muslim Americans, using what it called “mosque crawlers” (paid informants) and “mosque rakers” (plainclothes officers) to collect information on which Muslims in the tristate area were praying at which mosques, which television channels were being watched in cafes frequented by Muslims, where Muslims went for haircuts, and much more. The police infiltrated student groups and community organizations, attempting to goad Muslims into uttering incriminating statements about jihad and terrorism. After the Associated Press exposed the program, the NYPD had to account for its practices. And guess what? The program never produced a single lead or generated even one terrorism investigation.

Then, in 2011, the Obama administration inaugurated its Countering Violent Extremism program, which again largely stigmatized Muslim communities while achieving next to nothing beyond making Muslims look even more suspicious. A major component of CVE was to recruit social workers, community leaders, religious figures, and others to help the government identify people who were “at risk” of becoming terrorists. But as Brennan Center fellow Emmanuel Mauleón put it in the online journal *Just Security*, CVE “relies on the disproven assumption that we can prevent terrorism by monitoring people who express ‘bad ideas.’”

The mindset behind CVE, however, wasn’t just about such idea patrolling, a clear violation of the First Amendment. Virtually anything could invite scrutiny. Back in 2014, an attorney in Minneapolis told me the story of a potential client of hers, a young Somali student at the University of Minnesota who needed to earn some extra income. He was hoping to become a taxi driver in Chicago. One day, during a class break, his professor saw the young man assiduously studying a list of addresses (which he needed to know for the taxi exam). Alarmed, she called the police, who called the FBI, which came and took the young man away for questioning. He was furious, the attorney told me, but didn’t want to proceed with a lawsuit, afraid that if he made a fuss, the FBI would open a file on him.

All of these examples occurred before Donald Trump formally entered national politics. Then, in December 2015, Trump began demanding “a total and complete shutdown of Muslims entering the United States,” as we all remember. Within months, anti-Muslim hate crimes rose, reaching new heights in both 2016 and 2017, surpassing the previous record from 2001. Even then, Trump continued to spout and spew and share outrageously anti-Muslim tweets, instrumentalizing Islamophobic sentiment in his political discourse.

But Trump’s signal achievement in the annals of Muslim American life didn’t come from him directly. That feat was accomplished when the Supreme Court upheld his Muslim ban on June 26, 2018, continuing a legacy of American racism in the court’s decisions that goes back to its support for Japanese internment (1944), Chinese exclusion (1888), and Black enslavement (1856, in the *Dred Scott* case, when the court ruled that Black people, after having literally helped build this nation with their unpaid labor, should not be considered citizens).

This American desire to withhold citizenship from the marginalized and the vulnerable never seems to fade away. A 2018 survey by the nonpartisan Democracy Fund found that one in six Americans would deny Muslim citizens the right to vote.

WHAT HAS THE RACIALIZATION of Muslim Americans accomplished over these years? For one thing, it has enabled the dramatic expansion of our post-9/11 national security state. After the terrorist attacks, the FBI fundamentally restructured its operations, prioritizing counterterrorism, and Muslim communities across the country had to respond by holding regular “know your rights” workshops, often addressing the question of what to do when you think someone in your mosque is an informant. That was the new reality. And yet the rationale for this degree of law enforcement infiltration was always questionable. Since 9/11, the US government has arrested and prosecuted 972 people, mostly Muslims, on terrorism charges. But according to *The Intercept*, which keeps a comprehensive database on these cases, the vast majority of those prosecuted were nowhere near committing a violent act.

Of course, terrorism is a serious problem, and as a society we should always be working toward the eradication of political violence. But if you see only terrorism lurking behind Muslim Americans, not only are you painting your world with a wide (and, ultimately, racist) brush, but you will also miss all the other acts of terrorism happening in front of your eyes.

For 20 years now, we Muslim Americans have individually and collectively had to repudiate acts that we had nothing to do with while simultaneously proving our patriotism, seemingly ad nauseam. And still, it was never enough. Remember Pastor Terry Jones and his Burn the Quran Day? Or the frenzy around the proposed Islamic Center in downtown Manhattan (the so-called Ground Zero mosque)? Or, similar to today’s conservative hallucination that critical race theory is hastening the demise of America, all the

(continued on page 27)

20
Years
of Bloodshed
and Delusion

Muslim dissent:
Tens of thousands of New Yorkers protested the NYPD’s racial profiling, including spying on Muslims, in 2012.

For 20 years now, we Muslim Americans have individually and collectively had to repudiate acts that we had nothing to do with.



Why America



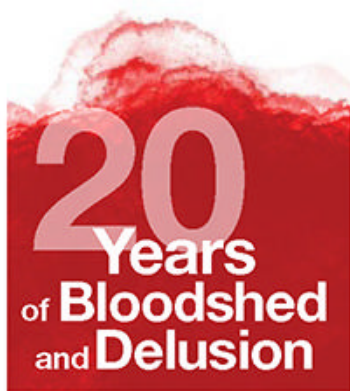
Money drives the US military machine.

Goes to War



In plane sight:
The B-1 bomber is notoriously unreliable. But on the bright side, it's very expensive.

BY ANDREW COCKBURN



Innumerable wars originate, wrote Alexander Hamilton in *Federalist* No. 6, “entirely in private passions; in the attachments, enmities, interests, hopes, and fears of leading individuals in the communities of which they are members.”

As an illustration of this truth, he cited the case of Pericles, lauded as one of the greatest statesmen of classical Athens, who “in compliance with the resentment of a prostitute, at the expense of much of the blood and treasure of his countrymen, attacked, vanquished, and destroyed the city of the Samnians” before igniting the disastrous Peloponnesian War in order to extricate himself from political problems back home.

It should come as no surprise that this version of Athenian history is not echoed by orthodox historians, despite credible sources buttressing Hamilton’s pithy account. Instead, Pericles’s attack on Samos is generally ascribed to his concern for protecting a democratic regime in the neighboring city of Miletus or the need to preserve Athenian “credibility” as a great power.

The compulsion to endow states and leaders with respectable motives for their actions is far from confined to ancient historians. It extends across the spectrum of contemporary foreign and defense policy analysis and commentary, from academic ivory towers housing international relations and national security studies departments to think tanks, research institutes, and, of course, media of every variety. Thus, in modern times, two former

national security eminences for the Brookings Institution stated that the goal of expanding NATO into Eastern Europe in the 1990s was to “promote peace and stability on the European continent through the integration of the new Central and Eastern European democracies into a wider Euro-Atlantic community, in which the United States would remain deeply engaged.”

Actually, it wasn’t. The driving force behind the expansion, which ensured Russian paranoia and consequent instability in Eastern Europe, was the necessity of opening new

markets for American arms companies, coupled with the prospect of political reward for President Bill Clinton among relevant voting blocs in the Midwest.

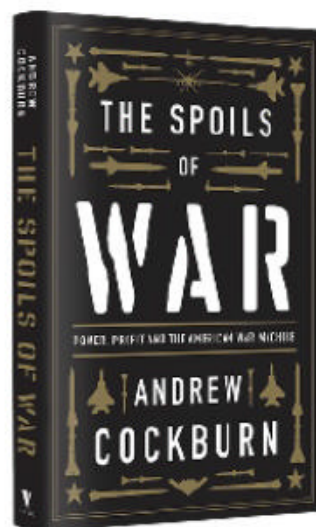
Outsiders generally find it hard to grasp an essential truth about the US military machine, which is that war-fighting efficiency has a low priority by comparison with considerations of personal and internal bureaucratic advantage. The Air Force, for example, has long striven to get rid of a plane, the inexpensive A-10 “Warthog,” that works supremely well in protecting ground troops. But such combat effectiveness is irrelevant to the service because its institutional prosperity is based on hugely expensive long-range (and perennially ineffective) bombers that pose lethal dangers to friendly soldiers, not to mention civilians, on the ground. The US armed services are expending vast sums on developing “hypersonic” weapons of proven infeasibility on the spurious grounds that the Russians have established a lead

in this field. Despite the fact that hundreds of thousands of veterans of the post-9/11 wars suffer from traumatic brain injury induced by bomb blasts, the Army has insisted on furnishing soldiers with helmets from a favored contractor that enhance the effects of blasts. The Navy’s Seventh Fleet arranged its deployments around Southeast Asia at the behest of a contractor known as “Fat Leonard,” who suborned the relevant commanders with the help of a squad of prostitutes.

Fat Leonard’s inducements were not, of course, limited to carnal delights. The corrupt officers also received quantities of cash (in return for directing flotillas to ports where he held profitable supply

contracts), thus confirming the timeless maxim that “follow the money” is the surest means of uncovering the real motivations behind actions and events that might otherwise appear inexplicable. For example, half the US casualties in the first winter of the Korean War were due to frostbite, as I learned from a veteran of the conflict who related how, in

the freezing frontline trenches, soldiers and Marines lacked decent cold-weather boots. Like some threadbare guerrilla army, GIs would raid enemy trenches to steal the warm, padded boots provided by the communist high command to their own troops. “I could never figure out why I, a soldier of the richest country on earth, was having to steal boots from soldiers of the poorest country on earth,” my friend recalled in describing these harrowing expeditions. The “richest country on earth” could of course afford appropriate footwear in limitless quantities. Nor was it skimping in overall military spending, which soared following the outbreak of war in 1950. To the casual observer, it might seem obvious that the fighting and spending were directly related. However, although the war served to justify the budget boost, much of the money was diverted far from the Korean Peninsula, principally to build large numbers of B-47 strategic



War-fighting efficiency has a low priority by comparison with considerations of personal and internal bureaucratic advantage.

Andrew Cockburn is the Washington editor of Harper’s Magazine.

Raids on the public purse are rendered easier by a widening gulf between the armed services and the population at large.

Money lost at sea: The US spent about \$22.5 billion in R&D costs for just three *Zumwalt*-class ships, according to the US Naval Institute.

are ignorant of the military world and rely for insight on a press that is all too often either clueless or compromised by the need to maintain access to self-interested sources. This lack of awareness is exacerbated by an aversion to challenging military claims regarding technology, not least because such claims are broadcast and vigorously promoted by a well-endowed public relations apparatus. The June 2014 disaster in which a B-1 bomber, thanks to endemic technological shortcomings, killed six friendly servicemen (five Americans and one Afghan) provided an instructive example. The Air Force responded rapidly to the tragedy by inviting a *New York Times* reporter for a joyride on a B-1, thereby generating a predictably uninformed

nuclear bombers as well as fighters designed to intercept enemy nuclear bombers, of which the Russians possessed very few and the Chinese and North Koreans none at all.

THE REASON FOR THIS disparity in the allocation of resources should be obvious: The aerospace industry, as aircraft manufacturers had sleekly renamed themselves, was more powerful and

demanding than the bootmakers, and so that was where the money went. The pattern was repeated half a century later as American families went into debt to buy armored vests, socks, boots, and night-vision goggles for sons and daughters in Iraq, even as some \$50 billion was poured into esoteric devices to detect insurgents' homemade \$25 bombs. One such was Compass Call, a \$100 million Lockheed EC-130H aircraft equipped with ground-penetrating radar that could supposedly seek out buried explosives. Unfortunately, a military intelligence unit in Baghdad in April 2007 concluded, after analyzing hundreds of flights, that the system had "no detectable effect."

Raids on the public purse such as these are rendered easier by a widening gulf between the military services and the population at large. For decades, thanks to the draft, most Americans had either served in the military or knew someone who had, and so were aware at some level that the services were beset with bumbling bureaucratic incompetence. But these days most people

but positive review of the lethal (especially to friendly troops and civilians) machine.

Even when a weapons program's deficiencies are too egregious to be ignored, media criticism seldom strays beyond timidity, such as decrying excessive "waste" in the program, without probing how and why huge costs have become routine. The truth that ballooning costs can be directly ascribed to ever more complex technology, as was exposed in detail as far back as the 1980s by the Pentagon analyst Franklin "Chuck" Spinney, is never addressed. Thus, for example, the alarm prompted by Russia's takeover of Ukraine in 2014 generated budgetary rewards for the Pentagon but relatively puny forces in terms of fighting strength—initially a mere 700 troops in Poland, for example, to face the putative Russian hordes poised to invade. Overall, despite remorseless growth in spending, the US military continues to shrink, fielding fewer ships, aircraft, and ground combat units with every passing decade. Remarkably, more money apparently produces less defense.

Uninterested in such prosaic realities, liberals bemoan the money spent on arms and lament the "militarism" manifest in America's appetite for war, while avoiding the underlying driving force: the military services' eagerness for ever more money, shared with the corporations that feed off them, as well as the officers who will cash in with high-paid employment with these same corporations once they retire. In other words, the military is not generally interested in war, save as a means to budget enhancement. Thus, when President Donald Trump was induced to order a minor surge in Afghanistan in 2018, a conclave of senior Marine generals agreed to go along with the plan on the grounds, according to someone who was present at the relevant meeting, "that

it won't make any difference in the war, but it will do us good at budget time." Col. John Boyd, the former Air Force fighter pilot who famously conceived and expounded a comprehensive theory of human conflict, once pointed out that there was no contradiction between the military's professed mission and its seeming indifference to operational proficiency. "People say the Pentagon does not have a strategy," he said. "They are wrong. The Pentagon does have a strategy. It is: 'Don't interrupt the money flow, add to it.'"

Once this salient truth regarding our military strategy is understood, it becomes simpler to make sense of US actions, notably in provoking a new Cold War with Russia as well as toadying to the repellent Saudi regime—an ever eager customer for US arms—even in the face of its complicity in the 9/11 attacks or its war crimes in Yemen.



The true dynamics driving actions such as those described above are usually well understood internally, even if they are unnoticed or misunderstood by outsiders. Civilians may not comprehend what is at stake in the interservice battle for budget share, but every officer in the Pentagon surely does. Likewise, frontline soldiers and Marines are well aware that they are condemned to rely for support on the inaccurate B-1 bomber because the Air Force is determined to protect its lucrative bomber mission at the expense of the effective A-10.

While people have no problem in understanding the real political dynamics affecting their own group, there appears to be a barrier to understanding that the same dynamics might apply elsewhere. For example, Marines in Afghanistan's Helmand Province long cherished the support of the powerful tribal leader Sher Mohammed Akhundzada in battling the Taliban, whose forces he would helpfully identify. But the enemies he designated were all too often not Taliban but supporters of his chief business rival in the drug trade, another tribal leader who was meanwhile enjoying a similarly fruitful alliance with the British forces sharing the same headquarters as the Marine Corps. Overall, this woeful ignorance pervaded the entire US-led misadventure in Afghanistan, a saga of disastrous errors that is comprehensible only if it is assumed that the goal of the effort was "to do us good at budget time," which, as the trillion-dollar-plus tab for the war attests, it certainly did.

Comprehending that it is private passions and interests that customarily propel acts of state makes the consequences for their victims appear even more disgusting. The CIA long ago struck budgetary gold in covert warfare, leading it to ultimately forge a profitable partnership with Al Qaeda in its various assorted nominations. The agency's involvement in the Syrian civil war, in de facto alliance with Al Qaeda spin-offs, is commonly cited as the most expensive in its history. Equally gruesome, sanctions on Iraq throughout the 1990s, which killed hundreds of thousands of children, were supposedly enforced to compel Saddam Hussein to abandon his purported arsenal of weapons of mass destruction. But, as was later confirmed to me by the chief UN weapons inspector for much of the period, Rolf Ekéus, the Clinton administration knew very well, at least from the spring of 1997, that Hussein had no WMD, because he, Ekéus, had secretly told them so and planned a conclusive report to the UN detailing his findings. There would therefore have been no legal basis for continuing the embargo. But Clinton was fearful that lifting sanctions would cost him politically, since the Republicans would surely trumpet complaints that he had "let Saddam off the hook." Secretary of State Madeleine Albright therefore announced that sanctions would continue, WMD or no, with the predictable and intended result that Hussein ceased cooperation with the UN inspectors and uncountable more Iraqi children died.

Sometimes the naked pursuit of self-interest is unabashed, but even when the real object of the exercise is camouflaged as "foreign policy" or "strategy," no observer should ever lose sight of the most important question: Cui bono? Who benefits? **N**

Adapted from The Spoils of War by Andrew Cockburn (Verso Books, September 2021).



(continued from page 23)

useless anti-Sharia bills introduced in over 40 states?

Nor has this level of scrutiny been confined to some loony right-wing fringe. Who remembers Bill Clinton's speech at the 2016 Democratic National Convention? In it, he said: "If you're a Muslim and you love America and freedom and you hate terror, stay here and help us win and make a future together. We want you." Well, you know something? Bill Clinton's citizenship isn't contingent on my opinion of his beliefs. Mine shouldn't be on his, either.

But more than all of the above, the racialization of Muslims at home has rationalized the expansion of the War on Terror abroad, just as the War on Terror abroad fuels the racialization of Muslims at home. Each feeds the other in a dismal process of mutual dependency, though the sides are hardly equivalent. The destruction wrought by 20 years of war-making has been infinitely worse for those overseas than for us Muslim Americans. The statistics make for grim reading. According to Brown University's Costs of War Project, the United States' post-9/11 wars have killed over 800,000 people. At least 37 million people have been displaced, and a whopping 85 countries now have US anti-terror operations going on within them. The wars will end up costing the US taxpayer an obscene \$8 trillion. To the people of Afghanistan and Iraq, the losses are, of course, incalculable.

Muslim Americans understand that we sit at this key juncture of US domestic politics and foreign policy. Our fight against Islamophobia at home is a way to oppose these wars abroad, just as our opposition to the War on Terror overseas is a way of fighting Islamophobia at home. And while it's true that we are a complex and multifaceted community—some segments of which even supported Trump, just as religiously conservative Muslims sometimes disagree with politically liberal ones—we continue to lean left in the aftermath of 2001. More Muslim Americans

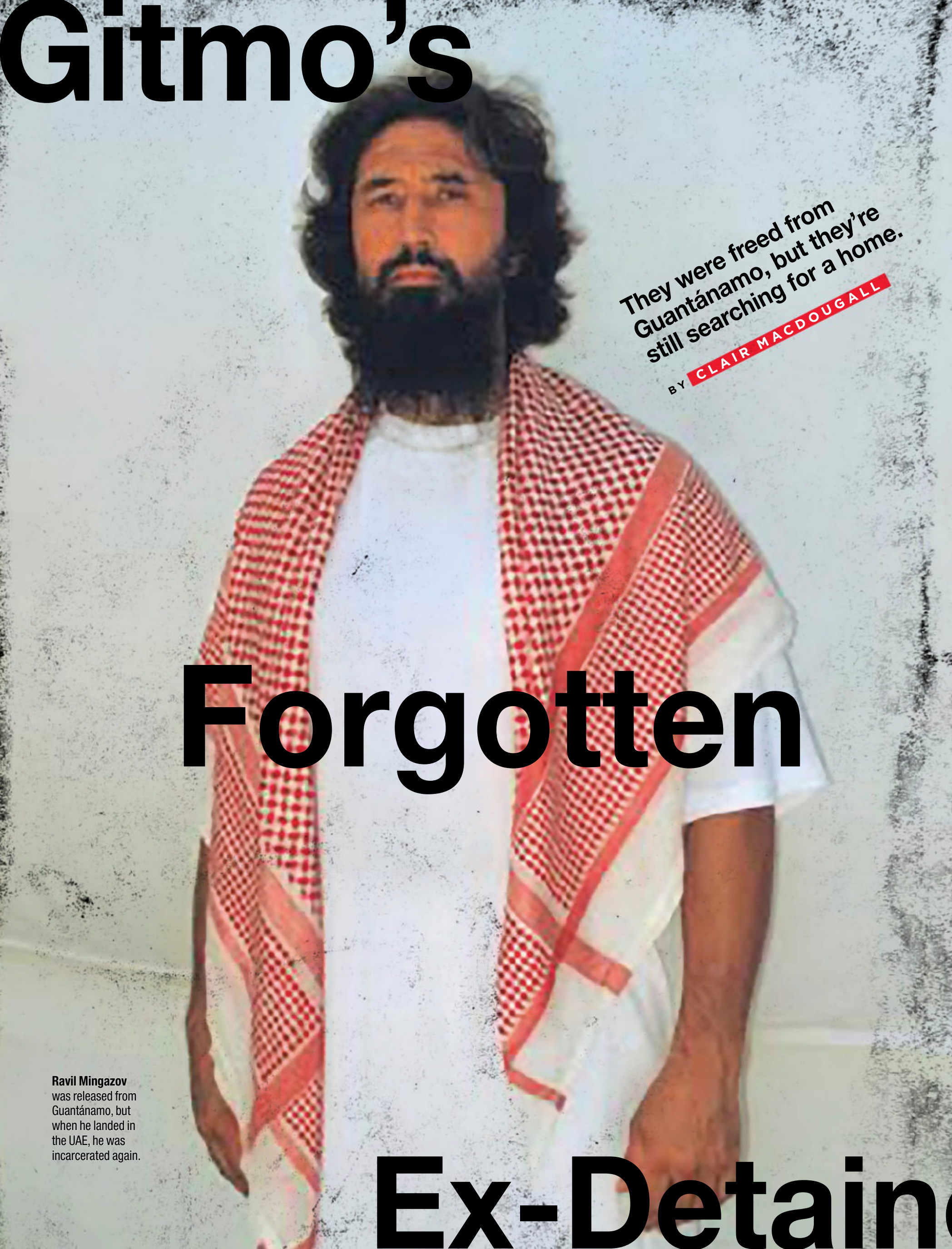
support Black Lives Matter than any other faith group. Among America's religious communities, only Jewish Americans are more willing to support building coalitions with LGBTQ activists. And when compared with the other faith communities and the general public, Muslim Americans are the most likely group to reject military attacks on civilians.

One of the most underappreciated results of the September 11 attacks is not the manufacture of a racialized Muslim American but the formation of an active and progressive Muslim American community. We have taken an identity foisted on us and have put it to good oppositional use. And we will continue to do so. It's high time that we push hard on the current American president to end these forever wars and to dismantle the structures that buttress Islamophobic policies wherever they are. These actions are not only worth believing in but also offer a profound way to honor every innocent life lost on 9/11 and after. Forget the myths about our Muslim descent. Twenty years after 9/11, what really matters—and what will continue to matter—is something else: our Muslim dissent. **N**



We have taken an identity that was foisted on us and have put it to good oppositional use. And we will continue to do so.

Gitmo's



They were freed from
Guantánamo, but they're
still searching for a home.
BY CLAIR MACDOUGALL

Forgotten

Ravil Mingazov
was released from
Guantánamo, but
when he landed in
the UAE, he was
incarcerated again.

Ex-Detainee



One afternoon in July, flanked by about 10 protesters in orange jumpsuits, the lawyer Gary Thompson stood outside the cultural attaché office of the United Arab Emirates in Washington, D.C. Speaking into a microphone, he called on the

UAE to stop its apparent plan to send his client, a former Guantánamo detainee, back to Russia, where he would likely be jailed and tortured. Four and a half years ago, the United States released Ravil Mingazov, a Russian national and a Muslim Tatar, and put him on a flight to the UAE, where he expected to start a new life. But when he touched down, he was immediately imprisoned in an undisclosed location along with 18 Yemeni and four Afghan detainees.

"We are here to express shock that our country is not putting pressure on the UAE. We are here to say, 'Shame on the UAE,'" Thompson said. "We will continue to protest as long as it takes. Ravil knows that we are not going to forget about him."

Thompson, who normally works as an insurance lawyer, was accompanied by the three other attorneys who formed the legal team that won Mingazov's release in January 2017. Men and women wearing Covid-19 masks walked past, and the sounds of jackhammers and construction vehicles drowned out the speeches made during the tiny demonstration over an issue that once drew hundreds to Capitol Hill. Someone emerged from the UAE's white attaché building on Massachusetts Avenue and took a few photographs before going back in.

From Enemy to Persona Non Grata

AS PRESIDENT BIDEN REVIVES THE OBAMA-ERA EFFORTS to close the detention center at the US naval base in Guantánamo Bay, Cuba, Mingazov's case raises concerns about the rights and legal status of detainees who must be resettled in third countries because of armed conflict or a risk of persecution. Of the roughly 780 detainees held as prisoners of war at the detention camp since its opening in January 2002, 150 have been resettled in 29 countries because

it was unsafe for them to return to their homelands. Thirty-nine prisoners remain at the camp, with 10 cleared for release and five expected to be considered for resettlement in third countries. In recent years, however, the UAE and Senegal have sent detainees back to conflict zones, something that former Obama staffers attribute to President Trump's decision to shutter the Office of the Special Envoy for Guantanamo Closure and the resulting lack of oversight of former detainees. But Biden has yet to reopen the office, and the bilateral agreements between the US and host countries remain classified.

The legal and human rights organization Reprieve, drawing on publicly available information and data from its clients, says that former detainees who have been resettled in 19 of the 29 host countries have uncertain legal status, ranging from renewable temporary residency to being completely without docu-

ments. (The data Reprieve shared with me was anonymized to protect its clients.) According to rights organizations and lawyers representing people held at Guantánamo, the Biden administration should not only release the remaining inmates and close the prison but also ensure that former detainees who are resettled in third countries have basic rights. As Katie Taylor, the deputy director of Reprieve and coordinator for the Life After Guantánamo project, said to me about Mingazov's case, "It really is the US's mess to clean up."

The United States may not have much time to help Mingazov. In late June, Russian authorities contacted his mother and asked her to identify him for a passport, according to Reprieve and Thompson. Taylor said this echoed the preparations that occurred in the lead-up to the forced repatriation of four Afghans, one of whom, according to United Nations experts, died "due to illness resulting from years of torture, mistreatment, and medical neglect at both Guantánamo and in the UAE."

The "Ballet-Dancing Terrorist"

IN 2006, THOMPSON MET MINGAZOV on the opposite side of a card table in one of the shedlike wooden structures where attorneys consult with their clients at the Guantánamo Bay detention facility. One of Mingazov's ankles was shackled to the floor, and the tall man looked gaunt in his white prisoner's uniform. Thompson's colleague Douglas Spaulding, a lawyer and retired US Marine who had taken on Mingazov's case, and their Russian translator were also there. Mingazov was wary at first, as many other detainees were when lawyers started arriving to represent them, but he soon warmed to the two men, who assisted him with his Administrative Review Board hearing, a process that determined whether a detainee still presented a threat to the United States. Thompson, a long-distance runner who often spent his off time treading along the ridgelines overlooking Guantánamo Bay, bonded with Mingazov, who was also in his 40s and paid attention to his fitness. As the

"We are here to say, 'Shame on the UAE.' We will continue this protest as long as it takes."

—Gary Thompson

Clair MacDougall is a journalist based in the Sahel region of Africa.



and they were forbidden from sharing classified information with their clients. “It’s like going into court with your hands tied behind your back,” Thompson said. “You have no way to test the evidence, and that’s why it shocks the legal conscience.”

In an unclassified but redacted opinion, Judge Kennedy rejected the government’s claims that Mingazov was a member of the IMU, the Taliban, and Al Qaeda and that he had attended an Al Qaeda training camp. Kennedy pointed to inconsistencies in intelligence reports and questioned the accuracy of translations. The judge concluded that Mingazov may have been “something more than an innocent traveler seeking a new home for his family” but that the government had failed to prove he was part of “the command structure of any terrorist organization.”

Kennedy ordered Mingazov’s release in 2010, but the government appealed and continued to do so for six years. In 2011, President Obama established the Periodic Review Board, with representatives from six agencies, which would consider the threat posed to the United States by the remaining detainees. On June 21, 2016, the PRB finally granted Mingazov a hearing in a trailer, where Thompson attested to his client’s “peaceful” and “cheerful” nature. Mingazov’s statement to the board was not included in the unclassified transcripts of the two-hour hearing, and the statement in which he argued his innocence in a previous petition is still classified. The summary of the determination by the PRB said that while he failed “to demonstrate sufficient candor related to events prior to detention,” he appeared to have been only “a low-level fighter.”

Now Mingazov was cleared to leave, but he had to find a new home. He didn’t want to return to Russia, where former Guantánamo detainees had been tortured in 2004. Latvia came up as an option, but Mingazov feared it was too close to Russia. Then a place in the UAE opened at the last minute. He understood he would need to attend a rehabilitation program that would last six months. But Mingazov liked the idea of living in an Arabic-speaking and Muslim country, and he and Thompson said they would run the Abu Dhabi Marathon together after he had settled in.

But with Trump winning the 2016 presidential election and pledging to keep Guantánamo open and “load it up with bad dudes,” time was running out. A day before Trump’s inauguration, Mingazov flew out with two other detainees. Thompson feared Trump would order the plane to turn around, but Mingazov made it. Over the next four years, Trump would release only one more detainee. Thompson told me, “It felt like the end of a movie.”

camp’s rules relaxed over the years, the members of Mingazov’s legal team would bring smoked fish, caviar, tea, and other Russian delicacies and share them over long chats about family, philosophy, and the details of the habeas corpus petition they were planning to file to challenge the lawfulness of his detention.

Mingazov is from Naberezhnye Chelny, the second-largest city in the Republic of Tatarstan, a region bridging Russia and Central Asia that is home to the Tatars, an ethnic minority of around 5 million, many of whom practice Sunni Islam. A ballet dancer, Mingazov joined the ballet troupe of the Russian Army and performed in the military band after he was conscripted. He once joked to Spaulding that he was “the world’s only ballet-dancing terrorist.”

In the army, Mingazov became more observant of his religion. He requested halal meat and time for daily prayer, which he said led his superiors to target him. He traveled from Russia to Tajikistan in 2000, hoping to resettle in Afghanistan and live more devoutly, according to leaked US government profiles of the detainees, though Mingazov’s lawyers say he ultimately wanted to move to Pakistan or the Middle East. Pakistani security forces arrested him on March 28, 2002, in Faisalabad, Pakistan, during a sweep of what the US said was an Al Qaeda safe house, according to these documents. The US government accused him of being a member of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), said to be an Al Qaeda affiliate, and of having participated in Al Qaeda training in camps in Afghanistan—a charge Thompson says Mingazov denies.

Still behind bars: A protester outside the UAE’s cultural attaché office demands that the country free its ex-Guantánamo detainees.

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The Long Road Out of Guantánamo

IN APRIL 2010, THOMPSON AND the rest of the legal team challenged Mingazov’s detention in the D.C. Court of Appeals. Thompson knew the court and Judge Henry Kennedy Jr. well but had represented clients only in insurance and fair housing cases, never in a classified hearing. Lawyers were required to read evidence and take notes in a secure facility across the Potomac River in Crystal City, Va., and they were unable to communicate with the detainees during proceedings. In most cases, the lawyers were not allowed to know the sources of the evidence,

“They said at the beginning it was a rehabilitation center, but they haven’t allowed him to do anything.”

—Yusuf Mingazov

From One Prison to Another

NOT LONG AFTER MINGAZOV'S RESETTLEMENT in the UAE, his teenage son, Yusuf, who was living with his mother in Nottingham, England, started to sense that something was awry. Yusuf was 3 years old when his father was detained, and the first time the two spoke to each other was on a video call when his father was still in Guantánamo. Now 22 and a college student in London, Yusuf said it's difficult to describe the emotions he feels when he sees his father now. Through his family's stories, he knew his father as a strong, noble, and patient man and as an accomplished ballet dancer and a good soldier. He had an idea of what his father used to look like, because of a family video and a photograph of Mingazov with a mustache leaning forward and smiling over him as a wide-eyed, chubby-cheeked baby.

The long video calls continued until his father left Guantánamo. But once he was in the UAE, the calls were less frequent and came at random times, Yusuf said. When they could speak, Mingazov told his son about the difficulties in the new prison—the solitary confinement and mistreatment—but then the calls would suddenly be cut off. “To see him broken like this,” Yusuf said, “it’s something different; it’s hard for him to be broken like this.” Yusuf softens the news for his grandmother Zuhra, with whom he talks regularly. “Her hope was to see him,” Yusuf said, “but now it’s for me to see him again, because she thinks she will die before she sees him again.”

Mingazov's lawyers and Reprieve have written to the UAE government but have been given no reason as to why he is still being detained after more than four years. Yusuf said he finds it baffling that his father was imprisoned again after his release. “They said at the beginning it was a rehabilitation center or something for him to adapt to new changes,” he said, “but they haven’t allowed him to do anything.”

The conditions under which resettled former detainees live are inconsistent, with some still separated from their families and placed under strict travel restrictions. While some have been reintegrated into host countries, many others have limited access to social ser-

vices such as physical and mental health care. Reprieve says that for ex-detainees to succeed in establishing normal lives, they must be granted clear legal status, and the US government must ensure that host countries respect their rights and fulfill their resettlement agreements.

Mansoor Adayfi, a Yemeni former detainee who was resettled in Serbia, told me that the Biden administration needs to speak to more detainees about how reintegration could be improved. Incarcerated at the age of 18 for 14 years, Adayfi complained about the isolation, the near-impossibility of getting married and establishing a family, and the monitoring by security services. He said he hopes to reunite with his family in Qatar but doesn't know when he will be allowed to move. Adayfi, who just published a book about his time in Guantánamo titled *Don't Forget About Us Here*, worries that he and others remain mentally trapped within the prison walls. He joked that it was “Guantánamo 2.0.”

A spokesperson for the US State Department responded to my questions via e-mail about ongoing plans for Guantánamo's closure and the resettlement of the remaining 39 detainees, writing that the department was searching for countries that would agree to “appropriate security and humane treatment assurances” and was “deeply concerned by reports regarding the potential forced repatriation of a former Guantanamo Bay detainee to Russia from the UAE. We have discussed our concerns with the UAE and will continue to follow the situation closely.” When asked later about the recent repatriation of six Yemenis held in the UAE, a spokesperson wrote that the UAE “affirmed that the resettlement would be conducted with the consent of the former detainees” and thanked the UAE for hosting them.

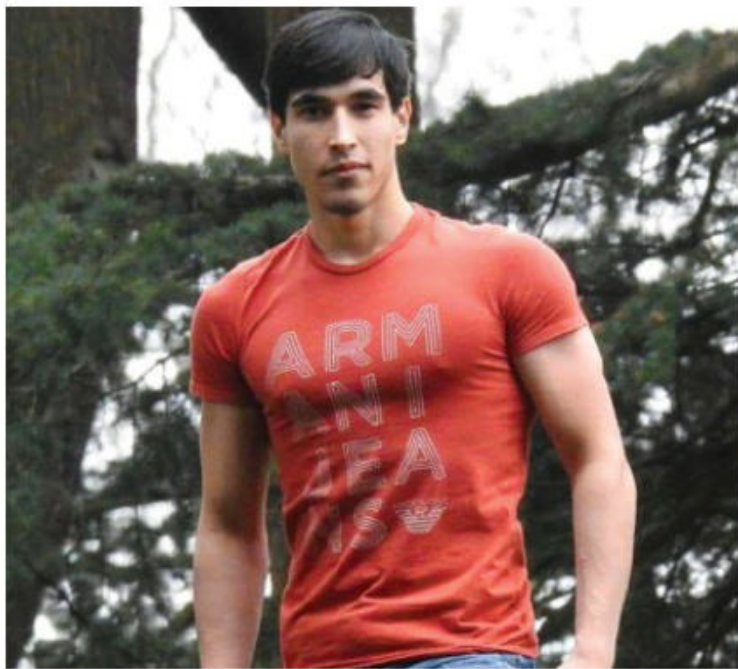
Veteran Guantánamo reporter Carol Rosenberg, now at *The New York Times*, said in a recent radio interview that it would take “thousands” of hours of diplomacy and a Congress willing to let the administration move some detainees to US soil to close the detention center. Steve Vladeck, a legal scholar, said that Biden has stated he wants to close the detention camp, but it's unclear how much “political capital” he is willing to spend. Some House Democrats have started petitioning Biden to close the prison, but there is still resistance, especially among Republicans. Vladeck fears that a lack of pressure on the part of the public could hold these efforts back. “Guantánamo was all but forgotten under the Trump administration,” he told me. “I fear that we are headed for more of that, even with an administration that is committed to doing what I think is the right thing.”

Back in London, Yusuf has become used to waiting for his father's release. Life rolls on: He does his homework; he goes where he wants and eats what he wants. But his mind often wanders to his father, who has never been found guilty and has been imprisoned for almost 20 years. “He's innocent. Why shouldn't he be released? They've kept him in there for too long,” Yusuf told me. “We have to fight.”

“Guantánamo was all but forgotten under the Trump administration. I fear we are headed for more of that.”

—Steve Vladeck

Yusuf Mingazov, Ravil's son, is studying at a UK university. He was 3 when his father was detained and knows him only through video calls.



Reporting for this story was supported by a fellowship from the Ira A. Lipman Center for Journalism and Civil and Human Rights at the Columbia Graduate School of Journalism.



The Terror of War

Two new books argue that the War on Terror changed American politics, but what if the sources of its violence have been present in the country all along?

BY SAMUEL MOYN



REPUBLIC THAT WAGES UNENDING WAR beyond its frontiers sets itself up for decline and fall. Its intractable military skirmishing is like the drip-drip-drip of water slowly eroding the sturdy foundations of an edifice before it collapses. Buffoons soon take their turns as mob rulers, coarsening and dividing a once-free society, before a barbarian horde tries to topple it.

Or so goes the “Roman narrative,” an old story of imperial decline that has instructed generations of politicians and political theorists seeking to stave off a similar fate. If you spend too much time fighting savagery, you become savage as well. “No nation could preserve its freedom in the midst of continual

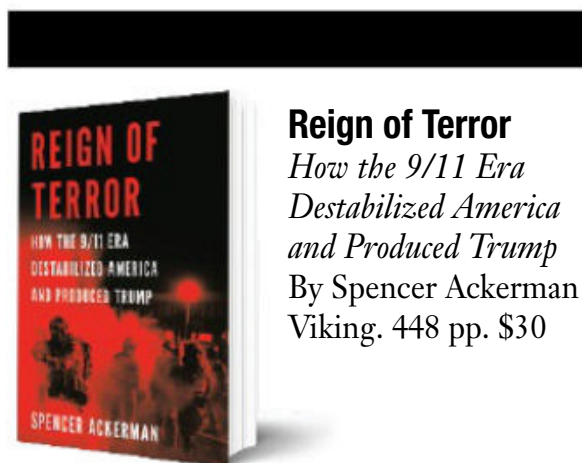
warfare,” warned James Madison in 1795. Added Barack Obama in 2013, in a statement that, in retrospect, seems prophetic: “A perpetual war—through drones or special forces or troop deployment—will prove self-defeating and alter our country in troubling ways.”

But there has long been both a minor and a major problem with the Roman narrative. The minor one is that no one ever seems to agree on when the free society went wayward. For millennia, observers have emphasized different causes and dates—which was easy to do since, as the 18th-century French political philosopher Montesquieu pointed out, from the beginning “Rome was in an eternal and always violent war” somewhere. Edward Gibbon, the most famous modern chronicler, opens his history with an admiring description of the Roman Empire as it embarked on its wars, with scenes from Augustus to the Antonines that read like a fanboy’s paean to military achievement. The pivot in his account comes only with the murder in 192 CE of Emperor Commodus, the narcissist who lacked “every sentiment of virtue and humanity” and was goaded into “unspeakable acts of cruelty” by a “servile crowd” that worshiped him. (He did not have red hair.)

But the larger problem with the Roman narrative is its complacent nostalgia for a time before the decline itself. Historical bickering about what went wrong and when presupposes that a lot—or enough—went right. Taking the virtues of the free society for granted, its way of life glorious until the intrusion of wartime vice, the Roman narrative, whether credulously or ideologically, implies that the problem was adventitious and occurred late. It becomes a matter of saving “the last best hope” from its “unwinding,” to quote the titles of two of George Packer’s recent books. But what if the sources of the cruelty and violence and putrefaction were of long standing? What if the crimes and pathologies of empire abroad and subjugation at home, belatedly fingered as the causes of collapse, had always prevented a republic from actually coming into being? What if the supposedly free society was unconscionably violent to its own people, and its military adventures far away were extensions or reflections of its unfreedoms nearby? The problem wasn’t a decline and fall, but a failure to rise in the first place.

In *Reign of Terror*, Spencer Ackerman opens with Madison’s warning and refuses to narrate the main events of the War on Terror in the years after 9/11 separately from their domestic ramifications. In *Subtle Tools*, Karen J. Greenberg studies how policies enacted to allow the pursuit of foreign “terrorists” 20 years ago, with their unexpected and unholy uses at home in recent years, ended up degrading our laws and liberty. For both, the whirlwind of the “forever war” of the past 20 years allowed Donald Trump to reap the opportunity for American devastation.

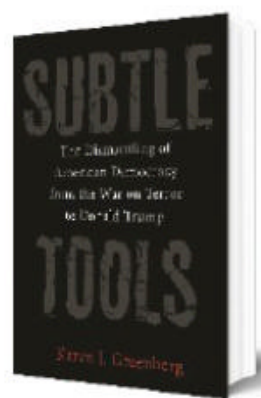
Samuel Moyn is the author of the new book Humane: How the United States Abandoned Peace and Reinvented War.



Reign of Terror
*How the 9/11 Era
Destabilized America
and Produced Trump*
By Spencer Ackerman
Viking. 448 pp. \$30

Subtle Tools

*The Dismantling of
American Democracy
From the War
on Terror to
Donald Trump*
By Karen J. Greenberg
Princeton. 288 pp.
\$29.95



Both books raise the question of whether the Roman tale of liberty spurned is the right one, while also suggesting the more disconcerting possibility that the pathologies were there all along. Ackerman at one point cites the observation of Aimé Césaire that unfreedom “oozes, seeps, and trickles” from “every crack” of an empire, including those found within its metropole: What happens abroad is only a manifestation of unfreedom at home. If this is true, then Ackerman’s and Greenberg’s focus on how the War on Terror led to Trump’s rise and reign—the Roman narrative applied to recent American history—is not necessarily wrong. But starting with the War on Terror and ending with Trump also isolates both from their genuine sources. It also distracts from how Joe Biden—who called in illegal air strikes in February and promised amid the fiasco of the pullout from Afghanistan

to sustain counterterrorist operations—is continuing our war, not ending it.

Spencer Ackerman has been among the most important journalists to chronicle the War on Terror almost from its inception. Writing for, among other publications, *The Guardian* and, until recently, *The Daily Beast*, he has shown himself to be a gifted reporter, winning a Pulitzer Prize for his role in bringing Edward Snowden’s revelations about NSA surveillance to the public. In *Reign of Terror*, Ackerman synthesizes two decades of his and others’ work to explore how the War on Terror “was not simply something that happened on the battlefields.” Rather, “it happened in the United States” and helped to create Trump and allow his profane works.

Karen Greenberg, a national security expert at Fordham Law School, has also been a precious resource, especially on the War on Terror’s legal machinations. The author of an indispensable study on America’s Guantánamo Bay prison, she has become one of the country’s leading experts on the perverse legal changes brought about by counterterrorism policy and the surveillance state. Like *Reign of Terror*, her new book draws from this experience to show how the “subtle tools forged out of the wreckage of 9/11”—the government’s use of euphemism, flexibility, and secrecy—worked for two decades to “smother the good out of a democracy in turmoil” and pave the way for some of the most infamous episodes of Trump’s presidency.

Ackerman and Greenberg hardly deny the excesses and ravages of our wars abroad. But their interest here—something the last president’s term and the current anniversary marking two decades (so far) of counterterrorism make pressing—is in what these excesses and ravages have done to America itself. And Trump, far from representing a deviation from the War on Terror, epitomized it. He “brought aspects of the war home,” Ackerman contends, even if “fundamentally the war was *always* home.” As Greenberg adds, Trump exploited existing “tools, already destructive, and sharpened them into weapons.” The boomerang of counterterrorism policy, invented to attack foreign enemies, ended up permanently disfiguring American life once it struck home.

Both authors sweep across the past two decades before reaching the age of Trump, and in doing so

they help periodize the entire experience of the War on Terror. For Ackerman and Greenberg, the two pivotal moments in the evolution of America's counterterrorism age were the early months of George W. Bush's presidency and the early months of Barack Obama's.

As both authors tell it, the initial days and months after Al Qaeda struck Manhattan and Washington, D.C., on September 11, 2001, were formative for everything that followed—especially Bush's proclamation of a war on "terror" and the supersession of limits that he and his neoconservative stewards demanded in consequence. "Having abandoned the concept of a war against a specific terrorist organization," Ackerman observes, "Americans would never be able to agree on when it could be won." From the start, therefore, the whole notion of a War on Terror was "conceptually doomed," and yet it would remake the country in its wake. Chillingly, Greenberg cites Trump the celebrity businessman predicting this very thing himself: On September 13, two days after the attack, he noted that "a whole different city and world" would arise from the smoking ruins of "ground zero."

It wasn't just that Bush chose unending war; he also supercharged border and "homeland" policing, racializing it on the grounds that—as his attorney general, John Ashcroft, remarked—the "enemy's platoons infiltrate our borders." Even as foundational decisions were made about how to move—notwithstanding the constraints of international law—against Afghanistan and Iraq, starting with Congress's near-unanimous 2001 Authorization for Use of Military Force, the government began to round up terrorism suspects at home, initiate domestic surveillance, and lift controls on detention and interrogation. Greenberg calls the AUMF the "Ur document" of the War on Terror, because its vagueness meant that it would authorize force against anyone. And as she shows in a separate chapter, Bush also moved immediately to set up the agency with the sinister name Department of Homeland Security, placing border control in a counterterrorism framework. Meanwhile, Congress passed the USA Patriot Act in October 2001, which ended up imposing few limits on such surveillance practices.

Ackerman stresses how near-universal the support for the War on Terror was across America's partisan divide in this first pivotal period. The neoconservatives in the cockpit of Bush's foreign policy, however showily many of them would later become never-Trumpers, continued or even extended their dangerous game of indulging the nativist part of the Republican base, which has proved to be anything but an atavistic remnant of the distant past. At the same time, the neocons were not above lecturing paleoconservatives like Pat Buchanan and others about their insufficient patriotism when they advised caution. As for liberals, they were compliant and supine—when they were not even more enthusiastic about the

opportunity to slay monsters abroad than their neoconservative frenemies. Part of the reason was electoral fear. "Anti-communist liberalism built the structures that confronted the Soviet Union," Ackerman comments, "but that did not spare it the demagoguery of conservatives for whom liberalism was a stalking horse for communism." Yet the most important reason was that mainstream liberals, too, were grateful for a new enemy to replace the one that had long defined their aggressive posture.

Minor pushback came only with the faltering of the Iraq War and the Abu Ghraib torture revelations in the spring of 2004. The legacy of this period was that the War on Terror was touched up, its torture and related prisoner abuses removed (with an assist from the Supreme Court, in *Hamdan v. Rumsfeld* and other cases). In the process, however, the earliest assumptions of the war framing and the licensing of force abroad were continued, even entrenched. Perversely, as I argue in my own new book on the period, the "humanization" of perpetual war adopted in the later Bush years ratified and even fortified his foundational choices to move the country to a war footing, even as the president's own popularity tanked. Just as, in 2001, mainstream opinion across the political spectrum had given the government carte blanche to create a new national security state, between 2004 and 2006 a renewed public legitimacy for the War on Terror turned on making it "moral."



That evolution in the war is why its second pivotal moment came during Obama's first months in office. The new president had campaigned on a selective opposition to the Iraq War, presenting himself as a broader peace candidate, while implying to those in the know his acceptance of an infinity war under the new and unconstrained

authorities that Bush had asserted and Congress had granted. Obama's anti-war speech as an Illinois state senator in 2002—provisionally rediscovered as he battled Hillary Clinton, who had even fewer scruples about America's might—was taken to be more significant than his votes to fund the Iraq War as a US senator or to expand the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act, which increased government spying, the month after he clinched the Democratic Party's nomination for president.

"Although his rhetoric about the war on terror suggested both legal and operational restraint," Greenberg writes, "Obama proved reluctant to surrender the flexibility that vague language provided for the presidential exercise of elastic powers." Neither expansive war powers nor limitless surveillance authority were reformed; their abuse continued, and in some instances they were even broadened. Nonetheless, liberals and the mainstream media lionized Obama for ending the War on Terror, while others nominated him for the Nobel Peace Prize (which he won later that year). Never mind that he killed members of Faheem Qureshi's family by armed drone on his third full day in office or that he used Congress's original AUMF against new enemies and in many more places.

Although the haze of gratitude that Obama enjoyed for not being Bush took a long time to dissipate—and then returned once the identity of his successor became known—both Ackerman and Greenberg show that Obama chose forthrightly to make the War on Terror permanent. Indeed, he not only extended it in time and expanded it in space but, with his lawyerly bent, formalized its legal basis to provide extra legitimization.

The expanded range and startling rise in the number of drone strikes, so associated with this second period of the War on Terror, should not obscure its other forms, such as the ramped-up use of America's special forces. "Drone strikes were more than just the centerpiece of Obama's counterterrorism strategy," Ackerman notes. "They represented how he saw the War on Terror: not as something to end, but something to reorient." Obama understood that the War on Terror could not continue in its cruel earlier form, either in bloody ground campaigns or unspeakable prisoner abuse (which was easier to avoid if suspected terrorists were not captured but killed outright). Even when his other compromises were eventually challenged by a rising

left indicting the rampant austerity and anti-Black violence of his era, Ackerman writes, the opposition to Obama was “not fueled by antiwar activism.” As a result of this transformative period during Obama’s first few months as president, what Ackerman dubs the “Sustainable War on Terror” was launched—and continues to this day.

But how persuasive is it to insist, as Ackerman and Greenberg do, that the War on Terror, aside from its grievous effects abroad, transformed America beyond recognition as well? And how illuminating is it to search for proof of a decline and fall in the coming of Donald Trump and his presidency—especially if Bush’s and Obama’s early months in office proved so decisive?

To the extent that both writers focus on the War on Terror proper, they face serious difficulties. Trump’s ascent marked what Ackerman calls the “decadent” or “exhaustion” phase of the War on Terror. In an excellent chapter, he shows that the American people and even some leading policy-makers had grown weary of endless war even before Trump was elected. Indeed, this fatigue helped give Trump an extraordinary opening, among the others he exploited in his astonishing 2016 breakthrough. Was his condemnation of the wars, then, genuine? Ackerman is contemptuous of any notion of “Donald the Dove,” and fair enough. Yet Trump pressed to withdraw troops from Afghanistan, Iraq, and Somalia, even if it is also true, as Greenberg documents, that his aggressive and lawless attack on the Iranian general Qassim Soleimani embraced the War on Terror’s legerdemain and the erosion of any limits on war powers.

If there was no Donald the Dove, it is mainly because the Sustainable War on Terror—with fewer deployed troops and more high-tech death from a distance—was something that Trump inherited more than invented. In reducing troops ever further in most theaters, even as he ramped up the use of drones and special forces against the Islamic State and others, Trump was simply following the policies of his predecessors to their logical conclusion (as would his eventual successor). Still, it is only fair to note that by running in 2016 on his own critique of US military policy—and of Bush himself, for the Iraq War—Trump helped make possible the Afghan withdrawal that Joe Biden is putting center stage to mark

the 20th anniversary of September 11 and to take credit for ending the “forever war.” Moreover, the anti-war cause saw no greater successes than during the Trump years, not just on the left but on the right—notably among the US veterans who massively supported him.

In other ways, though, Ackerman and Greenberg argue, Trump’s tenure did not augur the end of the War of Terror so much as its return home. Ackerman notes how, from its start, the War on Terror helped reactivate a nativist current in American politics and thus shaped the constituency that supported Trump. Greenberg meticulously documents how Trump’s Muslim travel ban was debated in the Supreme Court within a War on Terror framework—and how the considerable deference the court showed

to the president in its ultimate decision also presupposed the executive authority that had been granted over the past 20 years. “The legal and policy tensions of 9/11 persisted into the Trump era,” she writes, “and were brought into the open by the Muslim ban.” The same was true of border interdiction, with the Department of Homeland Security on the front lines of the administration’s outrageous policies. But the most vivid example for their thesis is in the nationwide protests after George Floyd’s murder. In response to the uprisings, Trump openly referred to the protesters as terrorists, explicitly calling for a counterinsurgency on American soil by the military, if possible, and by militarized police if not. “A wartime attitude took hold,” Ackerman writes.

That the former intelligence and military stewards of the War on Terror now professed themselves shocked to find their tools perverted in a domestic struggle against their fellow citizens was ironic, as both Greenberg and Ackerman note. Meanwhile, some Trump supporters moved to protect his nativist racism from the very national security state they once demanded, as the neoconservatives and national security functionaries bolted from Trump and were seen to be using their “deep state” powers to hem in and undermine the president. This development was the War on Terror through a fun-house mirror, as Ackerman notes, with paranoid fantasies of “Islamists in collaboration with the Security State.” Now American hatred and racism

required turning on the American government itself—in defense of its leader.

Greenberg concludes her study with the prescription to control or eradicate the “subtle tools,” now that we can confirm their domestication and misuse. More darkly, Ackerman suggests that by the time Joe Biden providentially ousted Trump, “a perpetual-motion machine of death powered by the worst of American history” had made it “increasingly difficult to see America as anything more than its War on Terror.”

But for all the power of a general argument that invalidates the War on Terror through Trump and his works, there are also limits to memorializing its first 20 years this way. As Ackerman sometimes implies, all of American history culminated in Trump. If so, then reducing Trump to the culmination of just one particular episode in that history risks making it

too easy for us to pretend otherwise. “The #Resistance,” Ackerman notes, tended after 2016 to “surgically separate their hatred of Trump from any examination of the America that produced him.” But by the very same token, one cannot surgically separate one’s hatred of the War on Terror from any examination of the country that produced it. American exclusion and nativism are hardly new, and the governmental euphemism, flexibility, and secrecy that Greenberg illuminates have been endemic features of America’s war-making for decades, if not centuries. Also, for all the appeal of the framework of counterterrorism’s blowback and boomeranging, racialized oppression—especially in the furious responses to bids for freedom and justice by the enslaved and their descendants—has been at home in the United States throughout its history.

Finally, by locating the costs of the War on Terror in the climax of the Trump presidency, we allow the argument to be made that, now that the “sane” conservatives and liberals are back in charge, all we need is some modest reform of the War on Terror’s blatant or subtle tools. That lesson is, indeed, precisely the dominant one among liberals today. Greenberg ends on an expectant note about Biden, even as she worries that the January 6 uprising has been widely analogized

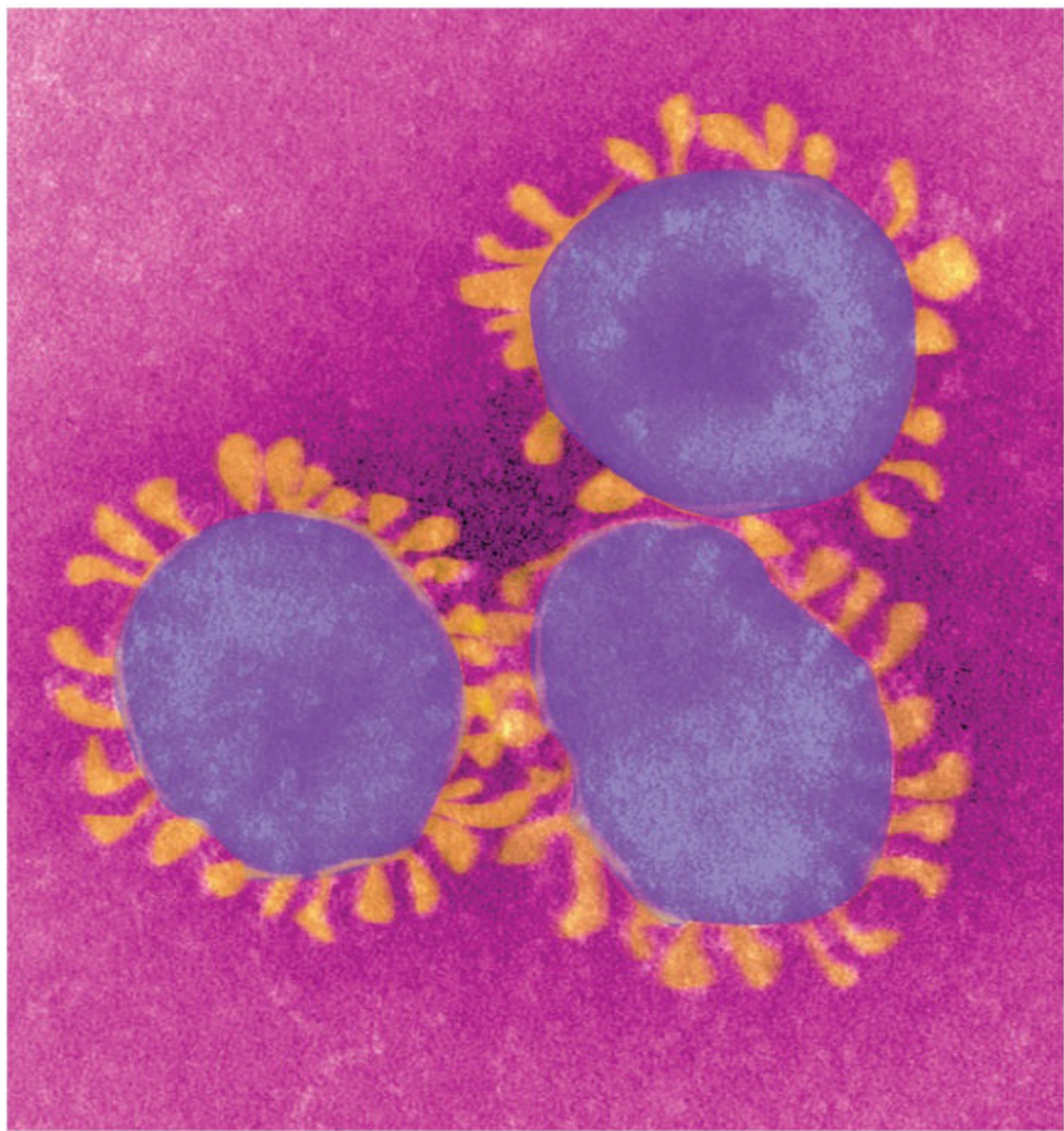
It wasn’t just that Bush chose endless war; he also brought its tactics to the home front.

with 9/11 as a national trauma requiring the most emphatic kind of patriotic response. She knows, however, that Biden and his foreign policy stewards are old hands at the counterterrorism policy of the past two decades and have so far done little—the withdrawal from Afghanistan aside—to challenge its ways.

The Roman narrative of civilized freedom undone through foreign wars is alluring. But it is also misleading. For a while, scholars have rejected the whole notion that Rome “fell”—a “paradigm,” as Glen Bowersock wrote some years ago, that mostly represented the “fears” of observers centuries later “as they confronted the instability of the civilization to which they belonged.” It still serves such a function today. And as scholars like Dirk Moses and Richard Waswo have argued, the Roman narrative is a “founding legend” that permits a measure of self-criticism in the name of honoring an otherwise supposedly great civilization—ignoring what Mohandas Gandhi and other anti-colonialists have long noted: that civilization has mostly been a euphemism for its opposite all along.

This is why we should not separate the War on Terror from what came before, nor so innocently fasten its conclusion to Trump, especially as a symbol and symptom of civilization’s degradation, without a deeper reflection on what it means to be civilized in the first place. On the 20th anniversary of the War on Terror, it is easy to slip into the Roman narrative, mourning a distinctive or even decisive period of freedom’s collapse. The darker—and truer—story to tell is one in which the War on Terror extended and ratified the cruelty and oppression that define our history more than many might care to admit.

On the other hand, the Roman example could well instruct us that there are uplifting possibilities in disorder and “decline.” Much as the historian Peter Brown did so breathtakingly in junking all the accounts of Rome’s decline in the first centuries after Christ, people might someday see the current period as the birth of something creative and interesting. Not only may there be limited value in a narrative of imperial excess coming home, but the harsh transitions we are experiencing now might be the birth pangs of something better and new. Of course, it is up to us to make it so. **N**



A Virus Without a World

The politics of science writing

BY DANIELLE CARR

ALL SOCIETIES HAVE A GENRE OF NARRATIVE KNOWN AS the “just-so story,” which exists to furnish a question about the world—“What makes the seasons change?”; “Why is the US military budget so large?”—with a tidy answer: “The seasons change because the god of the underworld kidnapped the harvest goddess’s daughter”; “Our military budget keeps democracy safe around the world.” The point of a just-so story is to explain not only why things are the way they are but also why they couldn’t be any other way. Floating somewhere outside of history, with all of its contingencies and struggles for power, the just-so story sparkles with the structure of myth.

A variety of mythic creatures populate Carl Zimmer’s slim volume *A Planet of Viruses*. Written to accompany the University of Nebraska’s 1998 exhibit “World of Viruses,” funded by the National Insti-

tutes of Health, the book is a collection of stand-alone essays, each featuring a different virus, with the new edition expanded to include a chapter on Covid-19. Over its 144 pages, we encounter crystal caves hidden miles below the earth, where unfathomable numbers of viruses roil; rabbits with mysterious head tumors that make them look like the mythical jackalope, caused by the same virus that

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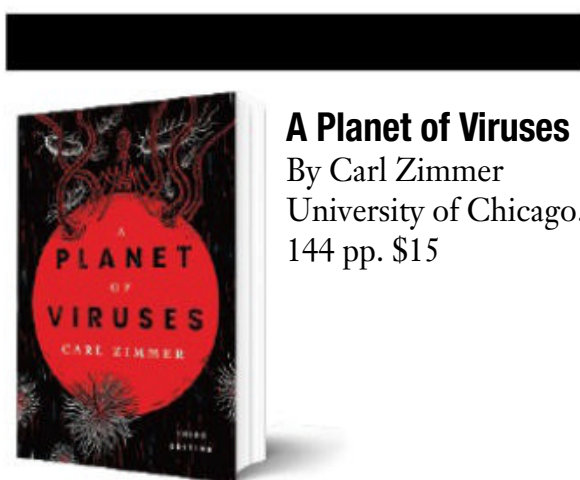


causes cervical cancer; viruses that elegantly hijack cells like master burglars coaxing a lock open without a key. We learn that the word “virus” comes from a Latin word that means both “a snake’s venom” and “human semen,” which Zimmer uses to illuminate the central feature of a virus: that it both creates and destroys.

Zimmer writes simply and with painstaking clarity, as if explaining something to someone who is easily distracted, and frequently employs his gift for metaphor. In this world, viruses appear as magical creatures, shimmering between life and nonlife. Like most of Zimmer’s work, the book has been read widely and seriously, hailed as performing the crucial task of educating the public about science. Eighteen months into a pandemic that has turned epidemiology into a theater of the culture wars, who could deny the need for greater public engagement with science? Both your local vaccine conspiracist and your neighborhood liberal technocrat will say that we need more accessible facts about science, especially when it comes to matters relating to our health, but their agreement ends there. The conspiracist’s goal might be to see more widespread skepticism about the vaccines and the profiteering of Big Pharma, while the technocrat might want to foster public understanding of viral transmission. At its core, the disagreement is about the very notion of what science is. Is science a single, universal process that stands apart from struggles for power and resources—aka politics? Or is science the name for multiple processes, undertaken by different groups of people for different goals, all conducted in the very trenches of political struggle?

How we answer this question is serious business. It has everything to do with what we think we are talking about when we talk about pandemics and, as a result, what we think we can do to prevent them. More to the point, how we answer this question has everything to do with the kinds of facts we think are relevant to the task of educating the public about science. If you think you can write about viruses divorced from social and political conditions, then you also assume that the politics of viruses can remain separate from other questions of power and distribution. Zimmer’s work has been almost universally praised as the pinnacle of popular science writing. But in its framing of what counts as relevant, does *Planet of Viruses* pull back the veil on the causes of pandemics, or does it mystify them even further?

With his cascade of prestigious accolades, Carl Zimmer is arguably the country’s premier popular science writer. The son of former Republican congressman Dick Zimmer, he began his career in 1989 after receiving a BA in English at Yale University, when he was hired by *Discover* magazine. *Discover* was created in 1980 by a former editor at *Time* who had spent the previous decade watching every issue of the mag-



A Planet of Viruses

By Carl Zimmer
University of Chicago.
144 pp. \$15

azine that featured a science story achieve blockbuster sales and decided to cash in on the public’s hunger for accessible science writing. As one of the first publications “selling science to people who graduated to be managers,” *Discover* was where Zimmer honed his style, eventually rising to senior editor by the late 1990s.

Now the nation’s most lauded explainer of science, Zimmer has expansively described his journalistic beat as “what it means to be alive,” appearing frequently on NPR and on national speaking circuits, and he is also in his eighth year writing the *New York Times* science column “Matter.” His multitude of best-selling books are widely praised as the “best of contemporary science writing”; in 2016, Yale named him an adjunct professor, saying that “his ability to make science, particularly biology, accessible to the general public is without peer.”

At a moment in which public trust in experts is at an all-time low, scientists and educators alike have hailed Zimmer for serving as a crucial translator between the white-coated technician at the lab bench and the everyday reader. Far from being just another hobby genre, popular science writing is often held up as the key to a problem that haunts the relationship between science and democracy. Ever since the United States emerged triumphant

from World War II, anointed as a superpower by its marriage of military and economic supremacy with scientific advances, the problem of science in a democracy has figured in roughly the following terms: If science is necessary for national security and economic advancement, how can it be governed democratically by citizens who are not equipped to understand what happens in the lab?

Among lay people and specialists alike, the postwar national mood was riddled with anxiety about how average citizens could participate intelligently in our society in an age of experts and specialized knowledge, a question sharpened by the threat of the atomic bomb. In an address at the centennial celebration of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, a university that is at the center of the military-industrial complex, CBS Broadcasting president Frank Stanton made a statement that his audience would have already been familiar with from a thousand op-eds: “The supreme importance of science and engineering in the advancement of modern society is abundantly clear. It should be equally clear that technical competence alone is not sufficient to meet the greatest crisis that faces the free world—the preservation of our democratic institutions.” In other words: How can a citizenry be kept sufficiently abreast of government-funded scientific research so that these often esoteric forms of knowledge can be governed by democracy rather than pose a threat to it?

If this is a key problem facing technologically sophisticated democracies, science popularizers can be viewed as playing a two-pronged role in its solution: They will persuade everyday citizens to care enough about science to keep voting to fund it, and they will help the public understand science well enough to navigate the political and ethical quandaries it can produce. Back in the 1970s, when *Time* was selling out its science issues, science popularizers like Carl Sagan explicitly understood their work as having a political dimension. But far from being an apologia for scientific technocracy, as peddled today by science explainers like Malcolm Gladwell and Cass Sunstein, Sagan’s writings expressed a kind of existentialist natural philosophy. His “pale blue dot” was

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not only an icon of humanity's existential condition but also had something to do, however hazily, with world peace during the Cold War's scientific arms race. Sagan envisioned the task of the science popularizer as that of equipping the public to govern science, writing in his 1997 book *Demon-Haunted World*:

I have a foreboding of an America in my children's or grandchildren's time—when the United States is a service and information economy; when nearly all the key manufacturing industries have slipped away to other countries; when awesome technological powers are in the hands of a very few, and no one representing the public interest can even grasp the issues; when the people have lost the ability to set their own agendas or knowledgeably question those in authority; when, clutching our crystals and nervously consulting our horoscopes, our critical faculties in decline, unable to distinguish between what feels good and what's true, we slide, almost without noticing, back into superstition and darkness.

The generation that Sagan feared might emerge is now upon us—but remain calm: Zimmer is here to help. Cast as the silver fox of science writing, Zimmer has been elevated to near-messianic status, a figure whose work will, in the words of one of his books' reviewers, “blaze a trail for a citizenry lost in scientific illiteracy.” But in a moment in which science is visibly shot through with social and political stakes, is Zimmer's style of science writing really the answer?

In a speech at Rockefeller University shortly after Donald Trump's election, Zimmer spelled out his view of how science and politics relate to each other. To Zimmer, they're not just opposites; science and politics are defined by their oppositeness. Cautioning young science writers about the dangers of presenting “both sides of the story” on issues sanctioned by scientific consensus, he remarked:

If you're writing about plate tectonics...don't feel guilty for not reporting on someone who wants equal time for their 200-page PDF online

about how there is not continental drift because the Earth is hollow. Does this make your reporting biased? That's an absurd question for a science journalist. Hello, my name is Carl Zimmer, and I am pro-plate tectonics.

That is to say, politics is something that happens outside of science, not within it. Why people might distrust science is not a part of the story science journalists are supposed to tell. Like all willful naivete, there's a seductiveness to the optimism here: One cannot be for or against plate tectonics, because one is simply reporting the facts. But such an approach has to bend over backward to bury its head so deeply in the consolations of “objectivity.” In real life, of course, there are glaring political factors at work in the everyday business of how science gets done: Who has paid for the labs and research? Who ends up holding the intellectual property rights? What is the purpose of the research? Is it to build weapons, to engineer a Green New Deal, or to make big bucks? What are the work conditions in which the scientific inquiries are conducted, and in whose service?

Taken as a whole, Zimmer's oeuvre is characterized by this rigid distinction between science and politics. His breakout hit was *Evolution: The Triumph of an Idea*, published in 2001 at the height of the George W. Bush-era culture wars over whether teaching “intelligent design” in public schools was constitutional. True to form, in the book Zimmer argues that evolution need not have any ideological or political implications—after all, science is not political. That this seems true to exactly none of the actors in the conflict he recounts—from the red-state legislators to the school administrators—does not disturb the placidity of Zimmer's analysis. His subsequent books on politically weighted science topics (most notably those involving neuroscience and heredity) are uniformly erudite, charming, and—above all—impenetrably sealed off from difficult political questions. For all its encomiums to the empirical, in the end this kind of commitment to an idealistic bit can survive the threat of reality only one way: by escaping it.



though rich in detail, *Planet of Viruses* continues in Zimmer's trademark style. While there is much in the book that's genuinely interesting, his approach is to serve up glittering strings of facts denuded of nearly all meaningful historical or political context. We learn the mechanics of how viruses hijack cells and are encoded into the human genome, but these natural actions occur in a world evacuated of anything resembling politics. To take just one example, we learn how pathologists figured out that HIV comes from a primate virus, but not that the reason that thousands of gay people died in the AIDS epidemic was that the Reagan administration blocked federal funding for HIV research. To be clear, I don't mean that the fact of the research embargo is not explored. I mean that it is not mentioned at all.

The result is something like reading a stack of Trivial Pursuit questions all drawn from the same category. The reader is left with a magpie's array of eye-catching flotsam, the sort of things that you may or may not be able to remember a week later, depending on your capacity for random recall: King Carlos of Spain designed the first mobile vaccination campaign in (checking notes) 1853, conducted by loading a couple dozen hapless orphans onto a boat that would deliver fresh pus, courtesy of their smallpox-riddled

bodies, for variolation stops along the American coast. Cholera is caused by a something-or-other named “vibrio,” which means either “living thing” or “to quiver” in Latin—I can't remember.

Certainly, there is much in this book that will make the reader say “Huh!” But without context to fasten these factoids to a historical or political space, Zimmer's description of the world of viruses begins to look less like cultivating an informed public and more like casting a lot of erudite pearls. It all smacks of an “In this house we believe in science” yard-sign energy, the kind of political analysis that reckons that so-called low-information voters in the boonies would be less prone to Covid conspiracy theories if only they knew that mitochondria are the powerhouse of the cell. As useful as it may be to someone preparing for a dinner party that

For Zimmer, politics is something that happens outside the world of science.

threatens to exhaust their reserves of small talk, how does this information help us understand the social and political stakes of scientific research? And if it doesn't, then what is the point of this kind of science writing—or federal funding for it?

Zimmer mostly begs off having to answer such difficult questions, in the name of inculcating “wonder.” Like an enchanted realm in which toys come to life and animals speak, Zimmer’s nature takes on an agency unto itself, just as human actions and choices are demoted to the sidelines. Viruses “decide” to invade cells. Cells respond with “decisions” of their own. The common cold is a “wise tutor” trying to teach the human immune system to not overreact to threats, and so on. “It’s only a metaphor,” you might think. “When has that ever hurt anyone?” But Zimmer’s metaphorical ventriloquism of nature comes at the cost of abracadabra-ing human agency and politics right off the stage.

The limits of Zimmer’s approach become apparent in moments like his chapter on the influenza virus. Opening with an examination of the term’s etymology (“a lovely word” coming from the Italian for “influence”) before moving to a discussion of what allows the virus to mutate so quickly, Zimmer airily notes that “in 1918, a particularly virulent outbreak of the flu spread across the planet and killed an estimated 50 to 100 million people.” Huh! With a flick of the wand, the capitalist and imperialist context in which the influenza epidemic emerged vanishes. You’d never know that the epidemic was facilitated by troop movements across the European theater of World War I, or that its effects in the United States were concentrated in immigrant communities whose members had come to work in the country’s industrializing metropolises.

Later, discussing avian flu, Zimmer describes how viral mutations lurking in birds’ guts can be passed on to humans, often through farming or poultry markets. One might expect a discussion of the role of factory farming and global trade on these interspecies transmissions, but Zimmer instead focuses on the immediate acts

of transmission, noting how the H1N1 virus behind the 1918 pandemic jumped from humans to pigs, then spread from European and American pigs to herds in Mexico, only to mutate and reinfect humans once again in the 2008 swine flu crisis. By Zimmer’s account, the various flu epidemics may as well have originated anywhere—and in any set of social and economic conditions. As he breezily notes, “Starting in 2005, a strain of bird flu called H5N1 began to sicken hundreds of people in Southeast Asia.” But as Mike Davis has shown, H5N1 began to sicken people in Southeast Asia because of a series of human-induced environmental shocks: a new proximity between wildlife and humans, caused by wetland deforestation, which was caused in turn by urbanization and the growth of mega-slums. Davis’s analysis implies that real solutions will require rethinking the basic contours of the global food supply chain and how urban space is organized. In other words, it’s not great news.

Zimmer’s prognosis is rosier, promising that solutions are coming to save us in the form of the inevitable triumph of “science,” if only we will let the scientists do the work for us. Indeed, one of the main reasons *Planet of Viruses* reads like a fairy tale is that Zimmer’s account is populated by imaginary characters: entities like “scientists,” who collect viruses from “patients around the world” in order to track “the relentless churn” of viral evolution. Appearing as a generic white-coated gaggle unmarked by nationality, race, gender, or class, Zimmer’s “sci-

entists” embark on a quest of universal good within a bubble devoid of anything like conflicting interests. The “patients around the world” are similarly devoid of complicating characteristics. Needless to say, there is no mention of the snarls that private funding can introduce into the supposedly universal scientific morality quest. In reality, many such ventures that help Zimmer’s scientists hunt for viral variants today—entities like the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation’s Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovation or the US Agency for International

Development—come into conflict with local stakeholders in the so-called Global South, who are all too aware that they will not share the profits made from the resulting treatments.

Zimmer prefers to avoid discussing the divergent and often conflicting interests behind scientific inquiry, indulging in a fantasy that humanity is all in it together. As in all cases of naivete clung to well past the point when the believer should know better, the charm starts to wear thin, and something sinister begins to show through the cracks. That something is power. Although nearly all of his book involves parts of the world that have been exposed to viral transmission via their violent colonization by the global capitalist system, it takes 83 pages to find the first of a grand total of three name-checks of colonialism. We find it in the chapter on HIV: “Colonial settlements in central Africa began to expand to cities of 10,000 or more, giving the virus more opportunities to spread from host to host.” With the virus hogging the active grammar, Zimmer treats colonialism as nothing more than human groups moving from one place to another, similar in kind to homo sapiens’ migration from Eurasia into the Americas. It’s worth quoting at length to give a sense of the tone in play:

When the first humans made their way into the Western Hemisphere some 15,000 years ago, they brought...a number of viruses with them. In the sixteenth century, Europeans brought a fresh wave of infection to the Americas. New viruses such as influenza and smallpox killed millions of Native Americans. In later centuries, still more viruses arrived.

It was the viruses that did the killing, you see. While Zimmer later acknowledges that “over 90 percent of the [Native] population is believed to have died” from the Europeans’ “unwitting” transmission of the disease, the observation receives just three sentences and is forgotten by the next line.

Zimmer’s discussion of smallpox offers a stunning exemplar of what Nick Estes has recently described as the “virgin soil” hypothesis, which attributes the unfathomable population wipeout of Native people to sad but ultimately unavoidable natural causes—namely, their immuno-

The limits of Zimmer’s approach are apparent in his discussion of the influenza virus.

logical naivete with respect to the Europeans' accidental viral transmission. In other words: Unfortunately, it was inevitable. Of course, this isn't true. As a universe of scholarly work has shown, the conditions for the smallpox pandemic were the violently imposed infrastructures of settler colonialism. The mission system crowded people together, stripping them of their ability to rely on the land and maintain nutritious diets, and the militarization of trade routes for commodities like fur heightened viral contact between settlers and natives. Narrating pandemics in the passive voice casts a magical veil over reality, as if everyone involved was spellbound and compelled to take the actions they did.

By the latter half of the book, the frequency of the passive voice comes as no surprise, emerging at virtually every point in the story where anything like politics threatens the magical scene. In an astonishing account of the HIV/AIDS epidemic, Zimmer writes that "by the time scientists recognized HIV in 1983...the virus had already become a hidden global catastrophe." But who did the hiding? Nowhere will the reader find mention of the Reagan administration's calculated embargo on research that could have stemmed a deadly epidemic it all but welcomed as divine punishment sent to afflict the nation's horde of nasty queers. In vain will the reader search for an explanation of why the rinderpest eradication program failed in Africa, except that it was hampered by "wars." In a discussion of polio, Zimmer reveals the cause of the disease's anachronistic persistence in Afghanistan and Pakistan: "War and poverty have gotten in the way of vaccination campaigns. Making matters worse, Taliban insurgents began to view vaccine campaigns as a threat and systematically assassinated vaccine workers."

Could the aforementioned "war and poverty" have had anything to do with a US foreign policy that treated the region as a Cold War pawn, culminating in an invasion that led directly to an interminable and bloody civil war? Could Taliban violence against foreign health workers have had anything to do with the CIA's 2011 scheme to use a fake hepatitis-B vaccination campaign as cover to source the DNA samples that confirmed Osama bin Laden's presence in a town in Pakistan? Pay no attention to the man behind the naturalizing curtain! These kinds of mood-killing questions have no place in this mode of popular science writing.

"Hold on," you might be thinking. "Fine. But what if politically charged analysis isn't the point of the book? What if Zimmer's intent was just to tell us some interesting facts about how viruses work?" Fair enough. But even if we accept that premise, if the ultimate goal of this type of book is to reinforce a public buy-in for the idea that the funding of and trust in experts can avert catastrophic pandemics—which would justify things like the fact that this text was produced with public funding from the NIH—then the solutions Zimmer serves up are still unsatisfying. Writing of the potential for the next deadly influenza epidemic to evolve beyond our current immune

capabilities, Zimmer bravely urges that "we are not helpless as we wait to see what evolution has in store for us." His solution? "All of us can do things to slow down the spread of the flu, such as washing our hands." With defenders of the federal science budget like these, who needs Rand Paul?



hough the majority of the text is written in such enchanted bipartisan grammar, Zimmer sustains a fugue-like descent into reality in the book's pièce de résistance, the chapter on Covid-19. Here, although no names are named, the administration of President You-Know-Who comes in for a standard-issue upbraiding of its bureaucratic incompetence: The creation of effective tests was hamstrung in favor of harebrained immigration restrictions; the lessons of the SARS epidemic were ignored, and no personal protective equipment was stockpiled; and when testing finally commenced, it was too little, too late. But with vaccines on the way, Zimmer writes, "by the end of the year [2020], people could see beyond the despair."

As someone who identifies as a "person," this is news to me. But who wants to end a fairy tale on a dour note? Per Zimmer's account, "the scientists" have triumphed as surely as Harry Potter must always beat Voldemort. In a moment when widespread distrust of the vaccines threatens to derail the pandemic recovery, such an optimistic belief in the public's faith in a unified entity called "science" is itself nothing short of heroic.

For all its charm, *Planet of Viruses* is filled

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with the sort of stories you tell children who, however precocious, are not yet ready to face reality in all its terrifying complexity. Pandemics are caused by viruses, and the world is just so. We live in the best of all possible worlds—unfortunately. But it's precisely the attribution of inevitability that makes these just-so explanations cold comfort. The problem with these magical universes is that, with a hylozoic nature at the wheel of history, there's very little you can do to control this history. That's why most stories about magical universes end with the people trying to escape them. They discover that the brutal truth of the magical universe is contained in Margaret Thatcher's tight-lipped aphorism about neoliberal restructuring: "There is no alternative."

But here's the good news. There is an alternative. It's called reality. It's dangerous out there in reality. It's riven by conflicts between people who do not want other people to survive. This reality isn't great either, but given the choice, I'll take it. Sure it sucks, you have to fight, and when you fight you mostly lose. Still, on the bright side, it's the only place you can have any hope.



What Is Owed

William Darity Jr. and A. Kirsten Mullen's case for reparations

BY WILLIAM P. JONES

REPARATIONS ARE HAVING A MOMENT. THIS MARCH, Evanston, Ill., became the first government in the United States to attempt to address racial inequality by providing mortgage assistance and \$25,000 homeownership and improvement grants to descendants of residents harmed by discriminatory housing policies in the city. Soon afterward, the US House of Representatives began hearings on HR 40, which would create a commission to study reparations for slavery and other forms of discrimination against Black people in the United States. President Biden expressed support for the study and reiterated that support at the commemoration of the 1921 race massacre in Tulsa, Okla., in May. Meanwhile, California became the first state to initiate an official task force to study and develop a reparations plan for African Americans harmed by slavery and its legacies.

Bolstered by the Black Lives Matter movement and last summer's protests following the murder of George Floyd, support for reparations has also been aided by a growing awareness of the history of slavery and other forms of racial exploitation in the United States. In the past decade, Ta-Nehisi Coates, Nikole Hannah-Jones, and other Black journalists have exposed a broad readership

to the question of reparations as well as to the scholarship on slavery's importance in the development of capitalism and American democracy, the racial inequalities inherent to New Deal social policies, and the causes and effects of mass incarceration. By doing so, they helped shift the discussion about racial inequality from a question of marginalization and oppression to a focus on the central role that Black people have played in the economic and political history of the United States. Despite the increasing awareness of this history, however, nearly two-thirds of Americans still oppose federal payments to Black people whose ancestors were enslaved. Opposition is strongest among Republicans, who view reparations as overly divisive and unjustified, but barely half of all Democrats, and only a third of white Democrats, support them.

In *From Here to Equality*, William A. Darity Jr. and A. Kirsten Mullen draw on both journalistic and scholarly sources to make a strong case for cash payments to Black descendants of slaves. To those who dismiss reparations as a recent claim for an ancient crime, they point out that African Americans have been demanding compensation since the end of slavery and that the debt has been redoubled by officially sanctioned violence and discrimination since abolition. Likewise, to the "alarmingly large numbers of Americans, both white and black, who do not believe that racial inequality and discrimination continue to exist," Darity and Mullen provide a detailed analysis of the deep disparities in wealth, income, education, and other measures of well-being that have persisted since emancipation.

Yet despite their clear evidence of the lingering effects of slavery and Jim Crow, Darity and Mullen isolate African American reparations from claims for compensation by Native Americans, immigrants, and others. Not only does this risk alienating potential allies, it also narrows the scope of what the Black freedom movement has almost always pursued: A radical program for economic and racial justice for all Americans.

The core of *From Here to Equality* is a rich historical account of how the economic inequalities between Black and white Americans were created and perpetuated through

centuries of slavery and the legally enforced systems of discrimination and political disfranchisement that followed. Drawing on the work of Anne Farrow, Craig Wilder, Joel Lang, and Jennifer Frank, Darity and Mullen explain that slavery was integral to the national—not just the Southern—economy, and that its proceeds therefore helped establish some of the nation's most prominent banks, insurance companies, and universities.

Emphasizing several periods when the United States might have taken a different path, they show how slavery became more durable and racialized in the colonial era and then expanded rapidly in the South after a brief period of ambivalence about it during the Revolution. They also explain how Abraham Lincoln and other Northern politicians sought to avoid conflict by appeasing Southern slave owners, and how their hands were forced by the recalcitrance of the Confederate states, rising opposition to the war among Northern whites, and the insistence of African Americans on turning the war into a fight against slavery.

In Darity and Mullen's telling, the Civil War was a critical moment not just because it ended slavery but because it also raised the question of how the formerly enslaved would be compensated for centuries of unpaid labor. They cite the testimony of the formerly enslaved minister Garrison Frazier in 1865, who explained to Gen. William Tecumseh Sherman and Secretary of War Edwin Stanton that “the freedom, as I understand it...is taking us from under the yoke of bondage, and placing us where we could reap the fruit of our own labor, take care of ourselves, and assist the Government in maintaining our freedom.”

This testimony was the inspiration for Sherman's famous Field Order No. 15, which would have distributed over 5 million acres of plantation land to formerly enslaved families along the Atlantic coast. A version of Sherman's order was taken up by Congress, but in yet another missed opportunity to repair the damage done by slavery, Andrew Johnson vetoed it and returned the land to former slave owners.

But the Civil War was not the last missed opportunity, and a key component of Darity and Mullen's case is that “the plunder” of Black America, as Ta-Nehisi Coates dubbed it, continued unabated throughout the 20th century and into the 21st century. Drawing on the work of Coates and other journalists, sociologists, and historians who have charted this pillage over the past century and a half, Darity and Mullen offer a story of dispossession, exploitation, and disfranchisement whose devastating costs, they argue, also “make the case for reparations.”

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From Here to Equality

Reparations for Black Americans in the Twenty-First Century

By William A. Darity Jr. and A. Kirsten Mullen

University of North Carolina Press.
416 pp. \$28



aving explored the centuries of injustice that now demand compensation, Darity and Mullen turn to the most common objections that they have encountered in the 15 years that they have spent researching and developing their case.

Over that period, Darity and Mullen explain, increased awareness of racial inequality has led to a multiplicity of reactions, from “challenging the legitimacy of reparations to asking questions about the logistics of a reparations plan.” Most of these objections are answered in previous chapters, but they also examine the claims that past injustices were addressed by emancipation, 20th-century social welfare policies, and affirmative action, and they show why all of these are clearly unsatisfactory in the face of the history they have recounted. Indeed, they argue, many of those initiatives—in particular welfare and affirmative action programs—not only failed to end racial inequalities but at times deepened them.

In the final chapters of the book, Darity and Mullen lay out a program for determining who is responsible for paying reparations, who would be eligible, how much would be paid, and how the funds would be distributed.

The detailed history Darity and Mullen present supports the moral and economic claims for reparations. Yet given the persistent opposition, it is puzzling that they describe the potential constituency for reparations in the narrowest possible terms. In written testimony submitted to a congressional hearing on HR 40, Darity suggested that the bill be amended to clarify that it would benefit only people who identify as “black, Negro, or African American” and have “at least one ancestor who was enslaved in the United States.” Acknowledging that this excludes “post-slavery immigrants” from Africa and the Caribbean, “whose own ancestors are likely to have been subjected to enslavement and colonialism elsewhere,” he suggested they could make their claims against the United Kingdom or France, but not the United States.

In addition to alienating potential allies, the exclusion of Black immigrants from reparations obscures not only the consequences of racism and segregation in the aftermath of emancipation but also the inherently international character of slavery and the inequalities it forged. The scholarship that Darity and Mullen draw on emphasizes the centrality of racial exploitation to the development of the United States, but it also demonstrates that the national story was, as W.E.B. Du Bois put it, “but a local phase of a world problem.”

The historian Ana Lucia Araujo, in her “transnational and comparative history” *Reparations for Slavery and the Slave Trade*, shows that the demand for compensation in the United States has always been related to reparations movements in the Caribbean, South America, and Africa. That tradition is carried on today by the National Coalition of Blacks for Reparations in America, which links demands on the US government with a transnational movement seeking reparations for people of African descent.

To limit the scope of what could be an international movement is a missed opportunity, but it also overlooks the influence of the United States and its role in international slavery and racial inequality. As Araujo explains, the US government's refusal to recognize Haiti weakened the Black-led republic at a time when it was attempting to establish economic independence from Europe and was revised only out of hope that African Americans could be resettled in the Caribbean after the Civil War. Since

then, US political, military, and economic power has undermined the economic status of former slaves and their descendants in the Caribbean and Central America and led many of them to seek refuge and opportunity through migration to the United States. Certainly, the US government bears some responsibility for those affected by its imperial power.

And that responsibility does not end with people of African descent. Darity and Mullen's account of slavery's centrality to the economic development of the United States includes frequent references to "Negro, mulatto and Indian slaves," and as Tiya Miles and other historians have shown, African American history has long been deeply intertwined with that of Native Americans. Commenting on the anniversary of the Tulsa massacre, Robin D.G. Kelley noted, "Any discussion of repair and reparations, of grieving and mourning the events of 1921 and its aftermath, must grapple with the colonial violence that made Tulsa or Oklahoma and its settler regime possible."

Darity and Mullen acknowledge that Native Americans "could make a far more costly claim on the American government than black Americans," potentially including the entire territory of the United States. Yet rather than casting Indigenous people as potential allies in the demand for reparations, they insist that such claims are "irrelevant" to the specific urgency of "the black reparations claim."

Black West Indians and Latin Americans are not the only immigrants with a potential interest in reparations. Emphasizing the whiteness, education, and wealth that some immigrants have brought with them to the United States, Darity and Mullen conclude that "voluntary immigrants" who arrived after the end of slavery "have benefited from America's Jim Crow regime and its established and ongoing racial hierarchy" and therefore share responsibility for reparations. But what of the Chinese and other Asian immigrants who were deprived of legal protections, landownership, and citizenship by racist exclusion laws; refugees from US military interventions in Afghanistan, Southeast Asia, and Central America; and Mexican "guest workers" and undocumented migrants who powered the "internal colonialism" that, according to the historian Mae Ngai, was also central to the economic development of the southwestern United States? As Erika Lee's recent history of xenophobia shows, anti-immigrant sentiment has often been closely linked to anti-Black racism.

These histories may help explain why Asian and Latino Americans are far more supportive of reparations for slavery than white Americans, and why, rather than dismiss all immigrants as beneficiaries of racial inequality, we should ask which among them might find common cause in a movement to end it.

In the context of an increasingly racially diverse United States, the need for allies is an issue of strategy as much as of justice. Acknowledging that not enough Americans support reparations, Darity and Mullen caution that their proposals will not be possible without "a dramatic change" in national leadership and "an inspired national movement dedicated to the fulfillment of the goal of racial justice." With African Americans holding steady at roughly 12 percent of the population, it is difficult to see how they could build such a movement on their own. Darity and Mullen suggest that support could also come from "whites descended from slave owners" who are seeking "atonement," but guilt seems a weak foundation for a political alliance. It seems more feasible to build a coalition of those with an interest in repairing the damage done by slavery and other forms of racial exploitation.

But if we are to build such a movement, its demands have to go beyond just one group's claims and one policy program alone. Darity and Mullen describe the goal of reparations as "sharp and enduring reductions in racial disparities, particularly economic disparities like racial wealth inequality, and corresponding sharp and enduring improvements in black well-being." These are admirable objectives, but even with reparations and the reduction of these racial disparities in wealth, African Americans would still face other falling standards of well-being endured by Americans as a whole. For example, if Black families were equal to white ones, their median net worth would increase from \$23,000 to \$184,000, but most of their gains would go to a few wealthy households: 10% of Black families would control 76% of Black household wealth while just 1% would go to the poorest half of Black families. To use another metric, in an economically equal United States, African Americans would likely still be killed by police and be incarcerated at far higher levels than citizens of nearly

every other nation in the world. Likewise, they would still likely fall victim to a health care system that prioritizes profit and a labor market that values productivity over humanity. Yet Darity and Mullen assert that "once the reparations program is executed and racial inequality eliminated, African Americans would make no further claims for race-specific policies on their behalf from the American government—on the assumption that no new race-specific injustices are inflicted upon them."

In his opening address at the 1963 March on Washington, A. Philip Randolph characterized the Black freedom movement as a "massive moral revolution" aimed not only at securing equal access to voting rights, government services, public accommodations, and jobs, but also at creating a society where "the sanctity of private property takes second place to the sanctity of the human personality." Americans of all races had a stake in that transformation, he explained, but "it falls to the Negro to reassert this proper priority of values, because our ancestors were transformed from human personalities into private property." Darity and Mullen draw a far more modest lesson from the African American struggle against slavery, Jim Crow, and other forms of racial exploitation. Their demand for repayment of the wealth and income taken since the nation's founding is worthy in its own right and would help address the deep economic disparities between Black and white Americans. Yet as Randolph suggested, the legacy of these freedom struggles is far more ambitious and revolutionary than the simple calculus of compensation.

Any political movement powerful enough to secure policies sufficient to repair the damage inflicted by centuries of slavery and other forms of racial oppression in the United States will also have the power to secure a more radical and enduring transformation of our social and political order, and it should do so for practical and moral reasons. To win reparations will require allies who have a shared interest in addressing the country's history of racial exploitation, but it will also need more expansive forms of solidarity and systemic change. As Randolph observed over 50 years ago, Black people "are in the forefront of today's movement for social and racial justice, because we know we cannot expect the realization of our aspirations through the same old anti-democratic social institutions and philosophies that have all along frustrated our aspirations." **N**



Letters

Library Science

Re “Saving the Library,” by Scott Sherman [August 9/16]: I was a plaintiff in the successful lawsuit to halt the plans to demolish the stacks of the New York Public Library’s main research branch. The stacks, however, remain empty of over 3 million books, now stored off-site. Sherman’s article revives concern—and, we can hope, action—about the state of public libraries in this country.

When I receive pleas for money to be applied to the physical plants of libraries in the United States, I respond by suggesting that such funds be directed instead to the remuneration of librarians and to the purchase and maintenance of physical books. One must now hope that the tide is turning on the anti-book trend in libraries, and that physical books and the librarian curators of those books are recognized as essential components of an effective and useful library system, necessary for all serious research and scholarship—the scientific work of the humanities.

C.M. PYLE
NEW YORK CITY

Imperial Tragedies

John Washington’s article “Syria’s Victims” [July 12/19] describes the tragedies that have affected the Syrian people, without reference to the role of US policy. Much of what enabled the Syrian civil war were the thousands of rebels financed by Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Turkey, and the United States. Timber Sycamore was one of the most expensive programs undertaken by the CIA, supplying funding for foreign fighters and huge imports of arms. The goal was

to overthrow the government of Bashar al-Assad and replace it with a more compliant ally.

The Syrian civil war remains a massive tragedy, especially since it continues with punishing US sanctions that today silently starve and kill Syrians.

MARTIN MELKONIAN
UNIONDALE, N.Y.

Washington’s article makes the questionable statement that the Syrian government “has staged multiple chemical attacks.” Barack Obama’s “red line,” that any chemical attack would be met by a US military response, set up an incentive for false flag attacks. If rebels could convince the West that Syria employed chemical warfare, they could provoke destruction of the Syrian military. There have been widespread reports that the rebels have used sarin gas. However, the US, France, and Britain later carried out air strikes against Syria in retaliation for the supposed chemical attack in Douma in July 2018.

The UN’s Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons has come under questioning by its own inspectors, who did not find evidence of a chemical attack at Douma. In sharp contrast, the OPCW had issued a report stating there were “reasonable grounds” to believe that chemical weapons had been used in Douma. A letter to the UN in support of the inspectors’ concerns was signed by 27 notable signatories, including four former OPCW officials. The accumulated evidence should inspire skepticism that the claim in Washington’s article is true.

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BACK PAGE

The New New Deal?

“When we took the majority in the Senate earlier this year, the American people entrusted us with a great responsibility: to make their lives better,” declared Chuck Schumer, the majority leader, when he launched the Democratic caucus’s \$3.5 trillion budget plan. Republicans were aghast at the prospect. “This is one of the most radical proposals in our nation’s history,” griped Florida Senator Marco Rubio, even as the details of the plan were being developed. Senate Budget Committee

chair Bernie Sanders says it will be “the most consequential piece of legislation for working people, the elderly, the children, the sick, and the poor since FDR and the New Deal of the 1930s.” The activists who have been working on the critical issues that Democrats say the legislation will address are excited, nervous, and determined to influence the budget-writing process and the debates that will extend from it this fall. Here’s some of what they have to say about initiatives that are expected to be included in the plan.

—John Nichols

Paid Family and Medical Leave

“This is a once-in-a-generation opportunity,” says **Dawn Huckelbridge**, the director of Paid Leave for All. “We are one of the few countries in the world that doesn’t have paid leave on the books, and this is the year when that can change.” Decades of organizing have framed the demands, and, she says, “the pandemic accelerated it all, put it under a magnifying glass. There’s always been a high level of support. The pandemic provided the sense of urgency.” Sanders says paid leave will be a major component of the budget. What’s needed? Huckelbridge is pushing for “12 weeks of leave time that’s available to all working people and is comprehensive”—with an inclusive description of families and sufficient wage replacement, so that taking time off is possible and available to all working Americans.

Climate Corps

“Imagine a world where millions of people, recent high school graduates and middle-aged alike, could work on projects protecting communities from sea-level rise, taking care of the elderly, distributing fresh produce in food deserts, restoring wetlands, and rebuilding after climate disasters, while getting paid a living wage,” says **Nikayla Jefferson**, an activist with the Sunrise Movement. “That’s the world we are marching for.” The Sunrise Movement is in favor of the roughly \$132 billion, five-year plan to employ 1.5 million Americans that was proposed by Senator Ed Markey and Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez. Like the New Deal’s Civilian Conservation Corps, the Climate Corps would provide employment for transformational work. It’s a vital step toward what the Sunrise Movement wants to see Congress do to save the planet.

The Care Agenda

A decade ago, **Ai-jen Poo**, the executive director of the National Domestic Workers Alliance, helped launch Caring Across Generations, a bold movement to address the nation’s crumbling care infrastructure. With strong union support, she and her allies got President Joe Biden to endorse a \$400 billion plan to invest in caregiving, with a particular focus on expanding Medicaid and providing fair wages and benefits for caregivers—86 percent of whom are women, a majority of whom are women of color. Now she’s working to assure that the funding is included in Congress’s budget. “It’s a game changer,” she says. “Talk about a high-leverage way of raising wages for women and women of color. It’s so direct.”

Medicare Expansion

“Eighty-three percent of all likely voters support expanding Medicare to cover vision, hearing, and dental care,” says **Alex Lawson**, the executive director of Social Security Works, the convening organization of the Strengthen Social Security Coalition. Sanders says such an expansion will be a core component of the budget plan. “As part of that struggle we recognize that steps along the way to an improved Medicare for All system must be fought for any time we have an opening,” says Lawson. “We have an opening right now to get millions more covered by a Medicare system that is expanded to include vision, hearing, and dental benefits, allowing Medicare to negotiate substantially lower drug prices for everyone in this country and build the foundation of a long-term care system.”

Taxing Corporations and the Rich

Amy Hanauer, the executive director of the Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy, sees the budget as a “long overdue” opportunity to achieve fairer taxation. Biden and Senate Democrats have highlighted the need for a plan to reverse the Trump administration’s giveaways to corporations and the billionaire class. If the pandemic taught us anything, Hanauer says, “it’s the cost that inequality has wrought for this country and how it’s undermining our ability to function as a democracy.” Noting that polls show overwhelming support for making corporations and the rich pay their fair share, she says, “Fairer tax policy is a great way to address inequality and get the money we need to address human needs.”





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